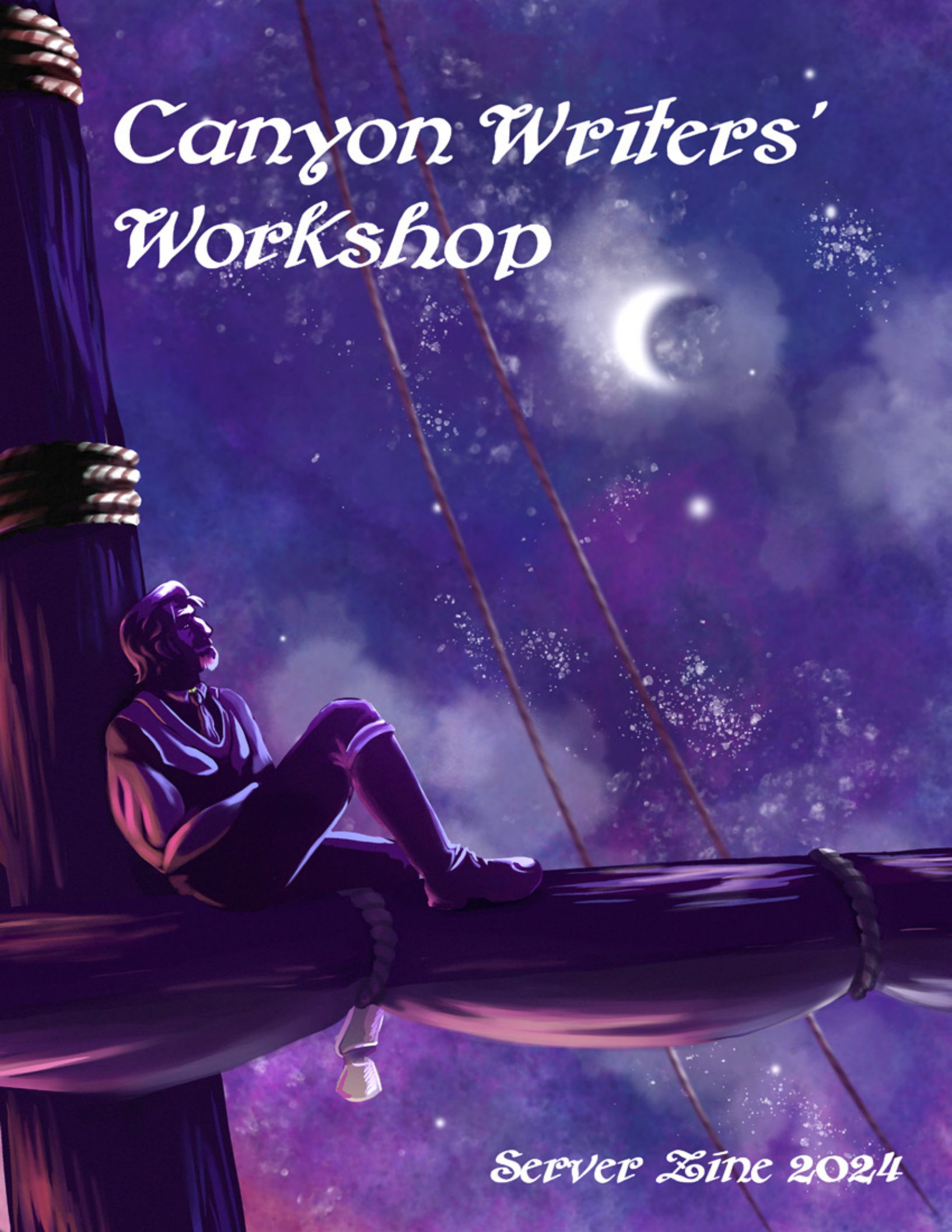
Canyon Writers' Workshop



Server Zine 2024





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Introduction

Hello!

This zine was created by members of the Canyon Writers' Workshop discord server. If you're already one of us, hi! Look at this cool thing we made! If you're not already one of us, welcome! Look at this cool thing we made! Come hang out with us, if this seems like your vibe!

Our server was set up as a space for Izzy-friendly writers to come together, learning, sharing, and collaborating. We've always striven to be welcoming and encouraging to writers of all levels of experience and ability, and that tenet was also at the core of our motivation for making this.

We have thirty contributors from all across the world represented in this zine, brought together by a fondness for Izzy Hands and a love of creation, fandom, and craft. We wanted to celebrate our creative community, as well as all of the assorted fan labour that goes into making OFMD such a wonderful space to share with each other.

We really hope you enjoy this zine as much as we've enjoyed making it for you. It was a labour of love, but then, so is everything we make as fans! It was important to us to make this zine as accessible as possible, but if you find yourself moved to give back you could consider donating to *Mermaids UK* (or another charity of your choice!).

Thank you for reading, and thank you to our beautiful writing community.

With love (and a raised middle finger),

Swev, Zee, and Ewelina

What's in the zine?

Our brilliant community came together to collaborate on a couple of chaotic *Exquisite Corpse* games, pass-it-on *Round Robins*, and a beautiful chain of *Sequential Drabbles*. We also ran one of our server-wide flash fiction challenges, and members were welcome to use what they created from an art prompt as their standalone piece.

We have *standalone fic* from 500-3000 words, G-E, fluff and smut and whatever might take your fancy.

As writers ourselves, we wanted to give a voice to the incredible betas who donate their labour to help us hone our skills. Check out the *roundtable* if you're interested to hear more about the role of betaing in fandom, as well as the practical and social aspects of the craft!

We were thrilled to be able to bring together so many creators in translating, podficcing, and illustrating our various works, and provide a platform for those key pillars of our fan community that are sometimes overlooked when it comes to publishing. Thank fuck for mixed media!



Collaborative Works



Sequential Drabbles

A drabble is a work of microfiction, one hundred words exactly. Microfiction is a wonderful creative challenge, forcing writers to really consider the words that they're using.

Our Sequential Drabbles are all linked in some way with the drabble that came before it, be it thematically, narratively or otherwise. This isn't one cohesive work of fiction, but a collective weaving where each participant plucked a different thread!

Max Rating: E



#1 - Author: Sweven

Rating: G

The explosion of flavour on his tongue is exquisite. It's smooth and rich, decadent in a way that makes a long-forgotten memory stir, of grey skies and soft laughter.

Izzy hesitates, but after a moment he closes his eyes. The chocolate melts in his mouth and carries him years back in time. Back to when his face had been smooth and the feeling of a rocking ship under his feet had made his eyes widen in awe.

"So?" Roach finally asks. "What do you think?"

The memory fades. Izzy licks his thumb clean of the sweetness. "It's alright, I suppose."

#2 - Author: Unopposablethumbs

Rating: T

Izzy's sixteen. He watches his mother mending by meager candlelight, eyes failing, not more than thirty-five.

He keeps a paring knife in his boot. Most locals leave him alone, but sometimes someone tries his luck, drunk on stolen rum and false bravado.

Hornigold finds him, hands covered in blood, teeth bared in fear and fierceness.

"Be needing a new deckhand now, won't I?"

That night, his waiting mother peers, nearsighted, into the night. Miles from shore, Hornigold slips Izzy Hands a piece of chocolate. Heavy on his tongue, it tastes of sweetness and iron and something close enough to freedom.

#3 - Author: Despising_Tories

Rating: E

Izzy felt beads of sweat rolling down his chest as he picked up his pace. Lucius's body quivered and a low groan rolled around his throat as his head fell back against the pillow.

It wasn't their first time. No, it'd been a few since the night Lucius had come to check on him. New unicorn and all that.

Must be doing something right, Izzy supposed. Or something wrong. Little strumpet was engaged now.

Izzy reached for the paper-wrapped chocolates Roach had given him earlier, and – selecting one – pushed it between Lucius's pink lips.

"Good boy," he told the lad.

#4 - Author: LaceratedLullabies

Rating: G

Izzy had a stash of boiled sweets, nowhere near the decadence of Roach's chocolates but an indulgence he'd allow himself on rare occasions. After the storm, with no idea where their next meal was coming from and precious little joy to go around, he'd shared them out amongst his crew.

Weeks later, when he wakes up in that thrice-damned sickbed after being shot, Archie is by his side. She holds out a handful of sweets in offering.

"Saved some of my share," she explains. "Reckon you need them more than I do."

He lets himself accept. They've never tasted sweeter.

#5 - Author: Nick

Rating: G

With the galley restocked, Captain Bonnet has returned to taking snacks during the day.

Today, Roach wheels in a tray of confectionery. Izzy peeks above his whittling project as Stede oohs and ahs over the treats. Ed is out fishing again, leaving Izzy alone with Stede in his cabin.

"Izzy?" Stede asks, but he already has Izzy's rapt attention. "There's more than enough for both of us."

Izzy considers his options. He could deny himself the creature comfort.

Or…

Izzy hobbles to join Stede.

Stede brings a bonbon to Izzy's lips; the soft smile on Stede's face is doubly saccharine.

#6 - Author: little fingies

Rating: G

Evening watch with Pete isn't the chore it once was. The man has mellowed considerably. Izzy knows some aphorisms about marriage that might apply, but he sweeps them aside when Pete appears on the forecastle deck to offer him a half-eaten chocolate truffle.

"Last one," Pete says. "Want a bite?"

"I don't want anything you've put in your mouth, twat."

"Shit. Gonna be hard to break that to Lucius."

A startled laugh jumps out of Izzy's throat and Pete grins, eyes sparkling like it's the first joke he's ever landed. Maybe it is.

#7 - Author: rimbaudofficial

Rating: G

"Can you taste this for me?" Frenchie asks, holding out a tiny cake.

"You can't taste it yourself?" Izzy asks.

"I want to be sure it's not cursed," Frenchie says.

"Nice of you to let me get cursed," Izzy says, far beyond arguing with Frenchie about whether curses are real.

"I'd help uncurse you," Frenchie assures him.

Izzy looks at the cake. It's coated in sugary icing, with a flower drawn on. It's adorable. He pops half of it into his mouth and chews. It's sweet and floral and lovely.

"Cursed?" Frenchie asks.

"Yeah," Izzy says, and finishes the cake.

#8 - Author: redshift

Rating: G

There are flowers in the vase by the window. It's the first thing Izzy notices when he pushes open the weathered door; air sweeps out of the room beyond, pulling the sweet honeyed scent of yellow-laden buds along with it.

He drops his seabag next to the tumble of boots in the entranceway. The bootleather needs treating, cracking at the edges and showing soft where the laces pull through, and the rattan sandals jumbled in between are half-frayed where the fibres knot together. He takes a deep breath.

He's been gone too long, this time.

"Iz?" A smile. "You're home."

#9 - Author: Unopposablethumbs

Rating: G

"Honey?"

Izzy startles, pulled from thoughts of watch rotations and manifests and the best price they can get for the shimmering bolts of jewel toned silk they took on in the last raid.

"What did you call me?" He wrinkles his nose. Stede stares at him over the teapot, white with tiny blue flowers, exquisite. He holds a cup in one hand, a pot of honey in the other. Izzy blushes, stammering. Stede adds a spoonful, stands to hand it to Izzy, kisses the top of his head.

"There you are, darling."

Izzy grumbles, hiding a smile behind his cup.

#10 - Author: LaceratedLullabies

Rating: G

Edward grimaces through his mouthful of tea.

“Think you’ve mixed up mine and Izzy’s cups, love.”

Stede flushes, embarrassed by his mistake. He’s always so careful to make them correctly; he’d even memorised Izzy’s preferences after watching him add two spoonfuls one time, though he had hesitated a while before he’d gone for the second.

Which would explain why he’s clutching the over-sweetened tea protectively to his chest. Ed’s eyes widen in realisation, and he hurriedly adds more spoonfuls to his own cup.

“Don’t bother remaking mine,” Izzy says, as though he’s fooling anyone. “No need to waste good sugar.”

#11 - Author: Sweven

Rating: G

Stede can hear the shouts from above-deck. He knows that he’s running out of time. This raid has gone wrong in so many ways, but something catches his eye and he stops halfway through the cabin. He hesitates for a moment before picking up the silver teaspoon. Ornate. Lovelier than most things at sea.

“Mate, you ready to—” Ed peers through the door, frazzled. “You good?”

“Hmm?” Stede flushes. “Yes, I just—”

“You want them?”

“We don’t have time, do we?” A distant roar punctuates Stede’s words.

Ed shrugs, something sparkling in his eyes. “We’ll make time. Grab them, quick!”

#12 - Author: Lacuna

Rating: T

Izzy knows his time is almost gone. He feels his self slipping away, like freshwater through cupped hands, like blood through frantic fingers. An empty shell no new crab will ever wear to wander the beaches. Possibly he's delirious. It's nice. The noises blend together to weave an exquisite shroud of silence.

There is sand, or there was sand, anyway. The last few grains bounce and dance within the curved glass. Hazel eyes meet blue in reflection.

"Dinnae fash, ye glaikit numpty. Ennet can be done, ennet can be undone." Witchy hands turn the hourglass over.

Izzy takes a breath.

#13 - Author: Despising_Tories

Rating: G

The captain smiled. 'No need to stand on ceremony, lad. You must be thirsty.' He gestured at the feast. 'Try the wine.'

The ruby-red liquid washed over his tongue and around his palate. Rich flavour of red fruit, spice and the tang of alcohol. Warmth spread down to his stomach.

Izzy was bloody thirsty as it happened. He took another gulp.

The captain leant forward, proffering a slice of apple on the flat of his blade and bringing it to Izzy's mouth.

'That's it, my boy,' the captain said, wetting his lips and watching covetously. 'Now, try the apple next.'

#14 - Author: redshift

Rating: G

Sometimes Izzy dreams of a house with an orchard, white blossoms swirling in the breeze. Slender honey bees drone past on their route from the flower-dotted meadow to the beds by the kitchen door and onwards back to their hive, framed by the heavy-drooping boughs of old apple trees.

Sometimes there's music, someone singing a melody Izzy can't remember when he's awake. Sometimes an unseen child shrieks joyfully outside. Sometimes the house is cold and the flowers dead, the bees silent.

When Izzy opens his aching eyes to birdsong and rafters, he wonders which version he's dreaming of this time.

#15 - Author: lustig

Rating: T

Retirement should taste like iron: heavy and cloying, choking Izzy while he tries to steal a last breath or two. That's what he has been told, over the years, that's what he began telling others.

With early morning sunlight warming his skin – and highlighting the silver in his hair – death feels very far away. They have an orchard now, a home on land they call their own. They take break days when old injuries start acting up.

And they create new delights with what the land gives them.

Some days, retirement tastes like freshly-plucked apples.

Today… it tastes of possibilities.

Round Robin

A Round Robin story is a collaboration by a group of artists, who take it in turns to contribute a part or section.

In our Round Robin we allowed five hundred words per writer, each one building off what came before.

The chains were given randomly generated dialogue prompts to use as inspiration, which was visible to all participants!

Chain 1

Prompt: "I knew you wouldn't be able to see it through."

Chain 2

Prompt: "You must be mad, coming here like this."



Round Robin Chain 1

by
LazyMedusa,
LaceratedLullabies,
Nick,
Buoymehome



"I knew you wouldn't be able to see it through."

“I knew you wouldn’t be able to see it through.”

Edward grinned from the other side of the rail. He tossed a bag over and hauled himself onto the *Revenge*, then pulled Izzy into a bone-crushing hug. “Good t’see you again too, Iz.”

“Ahem…” Bonnet coughed. “Could I get a little assistance here, perhaps?”

The few crewmen loitering above-deck made no move to help, but none looked particularly murderous either. Izzy took that as acceptance. Spriggs crossed his arms and shifted closer to Pete. Feeney looked up, tipped his chin in greeting and went back to knitting, and Roach grinned, wiping his hands on his apron.

Time healed all wounds, Izzy supposed.

His leg throbbed in agreement.

He pulled away from Ed and offered Bonnet a hand out of the wobbling dinghy, onto the main deck.

“Inn-keeping not what you expected, then?”

Bonnet’s eyes flicked to Ed, whose back was turned, then back to Izzy. Quietly, he said, “It was so boring. I thought—”

“The customers were dicks, mate!” Ed cheerfully cut in. “And Stede got all snippy when—”

“I did not get snippy! But you can’t expect them to pay their tabs when you threaten—”

“Alright, alright.” Izzy rolled his eyes. It already fell like they’d never left. “So, you’ll be wanting to sail with us again, is that it?”

“That’s about the size of it!” Bonnet said jovially.

Izzy glanced to the quarterdeck. Frenchie raised his eyebrows. Mightn’t be as

smooth as what he'd had with Edward, not yet, but they'd got the basics of Captain-First Mate communication down. "We'll have to ask the captain. Put it to the crew…"

"Oh." Bonnet's face fell. "Well… We assumed…"

"Come off it, Iz," Ed grumbled.

"You know the rules, Edward." Izzy fought back a smirk.

"Fine. Whatever."

"In the meantime, I'm sure we'll find something to keep you both busy."

Roach stepped forward, raising his hand. "I've got a galley of potatoes needing scrubbed and peeled."

Izzy nodded. "Bonnet, that'll be you then."

"Oh, I don't think I'd—"

"Anyone else?" Izzy asked the men on deck.

Spriggs lit up. "There's the haul from that last raid? Everything needs to be counted and cataloged. All ten crates of it."

"Edward." Izzy nodded at the door which led down to the hold.

Stede cleared his throat, flushing pink. "That is... erm.. Are we sure that's a good idea?"

"I can catalog!" Ed protested.

"Of course you can, dear, but well… you don't suppose you'll get bored, do you? On your own? Remember when you said you'd clear out the store room?"

Izzy took a moment to enjoy Bonnet and Edward's miserable faces.

He clapped his hands together, breaking the silence. "Back to work, the lot of you. That includes you two. Peeling veg and checking the stores, sounds just the thing for new recruits."

He turned away before he could ruin the effect by laughing. He'd let them off in a couple of days, but in the meantime, he'd have some fun.

Lucius leaned against the galley wall, watching Stede attempt to peel a potato and not cut himself on the knife, succeeding at neither. Roach had tried to help, but after Stede failed to follow his guidance for a third time, he'd left him to it and started working through the pile himself.

Lucius' anger towards Stede had waned, but it was always nice to see the man taken down a peg or two, which led him to the plan he was about to enact.

"Hey, Stede?" he said. "We need more potatoes, could you grab some from the store room?"

Roach looked incredulously at the piles in front of them, his cleanly peeled, Stede's uneven and patchy.

"We have plenty–"

"Of hungry mouths, off you pop," he said, all but steering Stede out of the door. Once Stede was out of earshot, Roach cornered him.

"What are you doing?"

"I've sent Stede on a menial task, in the room where Ed is guaranteed to be bored out of his mind. How long do you give it before the clothes come off?"

Roach broke into a wide grin.

"I respect it," he conceded. "But I still need another pair of hands to help with dinner."

"I'll… get someone on that," he said, adding hastily when Roach scowled at him, "I have to catch them in the act!"

Lucius wanted to get them in trouble. Not enough to get them kicked off the ship – if he'd been set on that, he could have just said so to Izzy or Frenchie, knowing they'd have listened. No, this was just a bit of petty revenge.

He pressed his ear to the store room door, and sure enough, the sounds shifted from muttered complaints to rustles of fabric. Lucius stuck around just long enough to hear the first bitten-off moan, before he beat a hasty retreat above deck.

“First Mate Hands!” he called out. From the prow, Izzy turned to face him, eyes narrowed.

“What do you want?”

Lucius gasped in mock-offense, clutching a hand to his chest as though he couldn’t believe Izzy would question him.

“I just felt it was my duty, as a responsible crewmate, to inform my superior officer when orders are not being followed.”

“The fuck have they done?” Izzy sighed, and Lucius dropped the act.

“They’re shagging in the store room.”

Izzy gave him a withering look.

“And *you’re* complaining to *me* about this?”

“Exactly!” Lucius said, snapping his fingers. “Because we’re treating them like any other crew member, and regular crew members get chewed out by their first mate for sucking dick on the job.”

Finally, the beginnings of a smile teased at Izzy’s lips.

“Fair enough,” he said, straightening up. Lucius fell in step as he headed for the stairs. “Interrupting them was fun enough the first time.”

Lucius’ eyes widened with delight.

“Oh, you have to fill me in on this.”

“Later, Twatty,” he said, waving him off. “I have a job to attend to.”

A year prior, Izzy might've had the hide of any deckhands buggering on the job.

Now, Izzy cared little to do more than chase the personal satisfaction of catching the two buggering (or having buggered the night prior) for a third time.

The sounds outside the door were familiar, and if Izzy closed his eyes, he could imagine himself when they'd first boarded the *Revenge*, no more than a fortnight in, when he'd overheard them at it on the main deck. Edward's sounds were all Izzy could make out, but he knew Bonnet wasn't the type to keep quiet.

The situation explained itself well enough, but Izzy came there for more than investigation.

Here, Izzy was judge, jury, and executioner.

With the same sweeping motion he'd used on the patched up diaphanous curtains, Izzy opened the door, allowing it to slam against the bulkhead.

Sure enough, Bonnet was on his knees, Edward's hands fisted in the golden waves of hair. Angled how they were, with Bonnet's back and Edward's front to the doorway, Izzy couldn't make out the gory details, but he could very fucking well gather what was happening. The obscene slurping noises had stopped as soon as the door hit the wall, as had Edward's groans. Edward's eyes were now wide, brows raised.

"Fat load of work getting done," Izzy observed wryly.

There was an answering wet smack that Izzy could assume was Bonnet freeing his mouth up to reply, but Edward beat him to the punch: "Fucking *counting*!"

"Can't imagine you were counting more than the amount of inches you could fit down Bonnet's throat," Izzy retorted, earning a gratifying—and fitting—choked sound from Bonnet's hunched frame. Edward opened his mouth to argue, but Izzy intercepted him with a sharp, "And you, Bonnet. What's your

excuse?"

"Potatoes," Bonnet rasped.

"Yeah, you're sat like a sack of potatoes, letting Edward use your throat," Izzy scoffed. "Job wasn't to imitate 'em. I ordered you to fucking scrub and peel them."

"No," Bonnet protested, his voice cracking on the single syllable like he was revisiting puberty for a luckier hand of cards. He cleared his throat, angling his head ninety degrees. His profile caught the interstice of light from the door, and his swollen lips shone with spit. "I mean… I was sent to grab more."

"Sent to—" Izzy raised his eyes to the sacks of potatoes.

To Bonnet's credit, one of them was open. That appeared to be as far as the effort had gotten, but…

"Why were you sent for more?"

"That is the question, isn't it?" Bonnet sighed, reaching up to fasten the fall flap of Edward's leathers.

Pieces began to fall into place. Izzy smirked to himself.

"Wait a minute," Bonnet said. Edward, who most likely had already figured it out by the time Bonnet arrived, laughed.

Setting those lovebirds up to fail seemed like exactly the sort of thing Lucius would've pulled for a lark.

"Back to work. Bonnet: potatoes, then *leave*. Edward: proceed."

As he made it back on deck, he could see Lucius was waiting anxiously for an update. Izzy tried to hide his smile as he shook his head ever so slightly. Let him sweat for a moment, he thought. He leant against the railing, took out his knife and a lump of wood, and began shaving strips off it. He knew Lucius enough to know he would come to him eventually, trying to be sneaky but failing miserably at hiding his intent.

It only took a few minutes before Izzy felt Lucius slide against him on the railing; Izzy ignored him, deliberately concentrating on his new whittling project.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe you’re going make me ask!” As Izzy finally turned toward him, he took a second to take stock of the young man’s face. There was excitement in it, in those eyes, and in the dimple Izzy remembered from when they first sailed together; like many other things, it had been missing for a long time.

“Proud of yourself, are you?” he finally said, putting the kid out of his misery.

“Whatever are you talking about?”

“Oh, don’t play coy with me, Spriggs, you know exactly what you engineered.” And there it was, the coquettish look Lucius used to sport, with his eyebrow raised just so and a turn of the shoulders. Izzy took it all in and hoped the entertainment he was getting from the situation was not visible to Lucius. He would capitalise on it, the little fucker.

Izzy knew he could order him around and do some chores, he’d find a way to pass down to someone else, or he could just let it be, for now. Around them, the *Revenge* was alive, new and old crew working together toward their new adventure. There were still wrinkles to iron, apologies to be shared, and wounds to tend to. The return of the prodigal captains was a blessing, a way to unite the crew in a bit of harmless mischief.

But Lucius didn’t know that, and his demeanor was slowly turning uneasy.

And while seeing the younger man squirm under his gaze was a never-ending source of satisfaction, Izzy felt magnanimous and decided to shorten his suffering.

“That was good work. Please keep reporting any slacking attempts over the next two days. Think you can rise to the occasion?

There’s a mix of emotions on the man’s face, but most importantly, the unease is gone. “Oh, I can rise alright, Dizzy Izzy.” It was said without malice, testing some water, stopping short of being a question.

“Fucking twat.” Let him guess, thought Izzy, going back to his whittling, silently dismissing Lucius. Lucius, who was already spreading the word amongst the crew.

Round Robin Chain 2

by
rimbaudofficial,
AbbyRosebud,
Unopposablethumbs



"You must be mad, coming here like this."

Round Robin - Chain 2
#1 by rimbaudofficial

It had taken some doing, but Izzy found Jackie'z, rebuilt and thriving, on Hispaniola. It was his last resort. He was never going to be inconspicuous, not with a famous face and a golden leg, but he did his best as he made his way to the bar.

"Hello, Izzy!" the Swedish husband chirped.

"Shut up," Izzy said. "I need to talk to Jackie. I *don't* need people knowing I'm here."

"Drink while you wait?" the Swede asked.

Jackie came to the bar and looked at Izzy once and then again. Her shocked expression passed so quickly it might as well never have existed.

"You're fucking crazy, Hands," she said. "Coming here like this."

She wasn't wrong. He was widely known to be dead, after all, and there were good reasons for that.

"There's nowhere else I could go," Izzy said.

Jackie sighed and signaled the Swede to get more drinks, then led Izzy to sit at a secluded table. Between the shadows and the smoke from Jackie's cigar, they'd be well concealed from the casual viewer. Izzy didn't know if he had to worry about less-than-casual viewers in Jackie'z. He rested his hand on the hilt of his sword for comfort.

"Tell Jackie all about it," she said.

"I'm dead," Izzy said. "Obviously. As far as Ed knows. And I intend to stay that way."

"Right," Jackie said. "Can't say I blame you."

"But since I died, there have been rumors. Not about me, but about what's going to happen to all of us. Someone's always predicting the end of the world, but this is something more."

He paused, taking a drink of the Swede's liquor.

"I need information, the kind of information I can't go out and gather anymore without being recognized," he said.

Jackie tapped the table with one wooden finger.

"Why don't you stay the night here?" she asked. "I'll give you a nice room and some dinner, and tomorrow I'll bring your man."

That was a much better deal than what Izzy had expected.

"All right," he said. "Show me the room."

Jackie led him upstairs to a hallway with many doors.

"I can't keep my husbands in the basement anymore," she said, "considering there's no basement. So they've got rooms to share, and I keep the extras empty for guests."

She opened a door for him, revealing a serviceable bed, a wash basin on a little table, and, incongruously enough, a vase of flowers.

"Your room, sir," Jackie said in an exaggerated impression of a posh accent.

"Thanks," Izzy said, too tired to play along.

"I'll have dinner sent up," Jackie said. "You just relax."

As she made her way back down to the bar, Izzy reflected that relaxing was the last thing he was going to be doing. He was here to save piracy, from itself if necessary, not enjoy a fine bed and a bouquet.

Nonetheless, he fell asleep sitting up as soon as he was off his feet.

Sleeping had always been a hard thing for Izzy. The longer he lived at sea the worse sleeping got. It started as small nightmares and then they escalated from there. Most nights the dreams just woke him up sweaty and panting, or aggravated with the outcome of the dream. Some nights it was worse though, some nights he would have vivid and graphic nightmares of events from his life.

Tonight was one of those nights where the details were more vivid. Of course it wasn't just one event either. The first morning when the kraken awoke, the throbbing pain of a pinkie toe being removed. Flashes of days where Ed slipped deeper and deeper into his darkness and Izzy took it all on as protector for the rest of the crew, leading to more bodily harm.

Izzy stirred in his fitful sleep as he felt his leg being removed in a feverish haze that left him in so much pain that Ed's words made him question what truly was his point in continuing on in life. The storm that threw him from his makeshift bed and the chaos on the upper deck was what had helped give him purpose, saving his crew from the kraken.

He will always be haunted by the image of Ed… His dear, dear Eddie assumed dead on the deck of the Revenge, but that image didn't last long. The rich twat with the fake nose took up most of the dream. The way he orchestrated mass destruction and an attack on the isle by befriending and manipulating Zheng and her crew. There was so much lost that night and so many bodies that everyone who survived would be haunted with the memory.

Izzy was watching that twat fawn over him all over again before listening to him threaten the life that had saved Izzy from death.

"It's about belonging to something."

Words he meant, words Izzy Hands had lived by for all these years.

Izzy felt it all over again as the bullet pierced his side, fired at close range by that Royal Brat. A shot that slowed him down further than he already had

been. A shot that left him near death and worse of all, it left him dead in the eyes of Edward. He had to let that part of himself go. He had to give Eddie the chance to live without him holding him back.

Before the dream could turn horrible, showing him how Jim had saved him and got him on the way to a safe place to heal, there was banging on the door that startled him awake with a shout.

Izzy raked a hand through his now damp hair looking around to gather his bearings once more and registered another knock.

“Oh just open it, Jackie,” he called but when the door opened Izzy’s eyes went wide at the sight of a now former crewmate holding the tray that had been sent up for him.

"Um. Hi."

Lucius's smile has a desperate edge. His hands clutch the edges of the tray too tightly, knuckles white as he tries to keep his hands from shaking. His beard, neatly trimmed the last time Izzy saw him, is overgrown, scruffy and ill-kempt. Izzy stares at him, frozen by the rush of conflicting feelings—panic and relief and fury and joy and confusion fighting a pitched battle none of them can win. He opens his mouth, choosing the only words that can encapsulate all of them.

"What the fuck?"

A few minutes later, Lucius sits awkwardly on the edge of the bed where Izzy spent his restless night. His shoulders hunch, drawing in towards his chest as he worries his hands together. The breakfast tray sits on the table beside the chipped vase full of slowly wilting red and yellow tulips. A petal falls from one of them, drifting down to rest on the quickly cooling toast. Izzy ignores it. He's not hungry. He picks up the dented tin coffee cup, taking a sip as he watches Lucius like he might disappear at any second. Ironic, given that Izzy's the one who's supposed to be dead. The coffee, sharp and bitter, burns his tongue, washing away the shivering unease of last night's dreams. Izzy's a practical man. He sees no use in dwelling on nightmares.

"I asked you a question, Spriggs," he says, not unkindly.

Lucius makes a sound, halfway between a laugh and a sob.

"Actually, all you said was 'what the fuck', which, believe me, I get, but it's not exactly specific, is it?" he responds. Izzy just raises an eyebrow, waiting. Lucius takes a breath, squeezing his hands together. "I can't believe you're really alive."

Izzy frowns.

"Yeah, about that…" he starts. Lucius waves a hand, cutting him off.

"You're wondering how I knew? Long story short, Buttons told me. Sort of."

Izzy nearly chokes on his coffee.

“Buttons? I thought Ed killed him!”

Lucius shrugs.

“We all did! Crazy, but it looks like he actually did turn into a bird.” Lucius rolls his eyes, though the tension in his body belies any dismissiveness. “He showed up on the *Revenge* a few weeks ago. Sort of. Look, it’s confusing, okay, I just… he told me I had to come find you, and where you’d be, and then he fucked off again, alright?”

Lucius’s knee bounces as he talks, nervous energy forcing its way out of his body as he sits slumped on the bed. Izzy sips his coffee, trying not to let the boy’s discomfort get to him. The shivery feeling of last night’s dreams crawls its way up his spine again.

“Okay,” he says, “So Buttons, who really turned into a bird, sent you to find me. What for?”

Lucius takes a shaky breath, looking Izzy dead in the eye—it’s unnerving. He’s never seen Lucius look so serious.

“You have to come back with me, to the *Revenge*. If you don’t, we’re all going to die.”

Izzy briefly considers letting everyone fucking die.

“Ed has to believe I’m dead,” he says automatically. “Everything was for nothing if he doesn’t think that.”

Lucius rolls his eyes.

“I think *our actual lives* are a little more important than Edward’s feelings,” he says. “And anyway, he’s on land with Stede, running an inn. Your grave’s in front of it, by the way.”

“On *land*?” Izzy asks. What the fuck? He had a literal tattoo on his hand to ensure he’d be buried at sea.

“On land,” Lucius confirms. “He’s got your leg as a grave marker, too.”

Izzy is struck speechless. What kind of brain-eating parasite does Ed have that he not only buried Izzy on land, as far as he knew, but marked the grave with a part of his body?

“My ring?” Izzy asks. He never thought he’d see it again, but he has a feeling….

“I have it,” Lucius says easily. “Nicked it. They were going to leave it on the grave marker, and, well. Jim would have killed me if I let them do that.”

“Jim?” Izzy asks. Easily his favorite person on board the Revenge, yes, but having his honor defended by them after death wasn’t what he had expected.

“Jim,” Lucius confirms. “They– I don’t know how it was with you, but they absolutely see you as a father figure. They wear your glove and everything. Your death was really, really rough for them.”

Izzy winces. He had figured his death wouldn’t be rough for anyone, really. He’d counted on it. It rankles that he was wrong, but a part of him is warmed by the idea of being cared for.

“Huh,” Izzy says, which he figures about covers it.

“Yeah,” Lucius says. “It was really fucking rough for all of us, in case you

didn't know."

"I didn't think it would be," Izzy admits.

Lucius sniffs.

"Well," he says. "It was. Luckily, you're coming back with me, so we'll get to undo that a little. I can warn you, people are going to be pissed with you for lying after they finish being ecstatic that you're alive."

"Fair," Izzy says, not even bothering to dispute that he'd be coming back with Lucius. "You need a shave, kid," he adds.

"I've been a little busy," Lucius snipes.

"I have my things, and there's water in the basin," Izzy says. "Why don't you get cleaned up?"

While Lucius does so, Izzy picks at the food he brought. It's not bad, but he's still not that hungry. His stomach is roiling at the prospect of going back. He's shocked his death mattered to anyone, that they'll be happy (or angry) to see him alive. Who would have thought?

A much more put-together Lucius turns around and looks at Izzy.

"We've got to go," he says. "Like, as soon as possible."

"What about the guy Jackie told me she had to help me?"

"Oh," Lucius says, waving a hand. "That's just Frenchie. He'll come with us."

“Christ, you drug Frenchie in on this too?” Izzy asked while moving to get up, still not loving his new leg option.

“Well as our Captain he had little choice. The ship is in Fang’s hands currently. Who Jim is having to help keep from falling apart too,” Lucius pointed out, jabbing that finger into the guilty wound a smidge deeper.

Izzy had gotten himself on his feet and nearly fell over at that. “Frenchie is Captain? Sweet, music-playing, locked away feelings, Frenchie?” He knew he sounded shocked but after everything they had been through when Ed was at his worst, it actually made sense.

Lucius gave Izzy a look. “Yes, yes, you can tell him how curious you are about his skills soon. Now get moving, Hands.”

Izzy smirked at the demand and patted Lucius’ cheek as he started to walk past him. “Alright Twatty, that’s quite enough.”

The pair moved back to the main portion of Jackie’s. Frenchie was talking with the Swede gathering whatever intel he could. When he saw Izzy with Lucius close behind he felt a bit of the weight lifting from his shoulders. Knowing Izzy was back on board the crew gave him a sense of relief because if anyone was going to give them a chance at a plan to get through this shit, it would be him.

“Good to see you again,” the captain said, clasping Izzy’s shoulder.

Izzy nods, patting Frenchie’s hand. “Guess retirement isn’t meant for all. Let’s go, we have the fate of piracy to save. You can fill me in on the details once we are away from the crowds.”

Once settled in the smaller boat rowing back for the *Revenge* they started to give Izzy the full rundown on what had happened in the relatively small time since his death and the retirement of the former captains.

“We knew he wouldn’t stop, destroying the Republic and Zheng Yi Sao’s fleet was only the start, so what changed that you needed the back up?” Izzy asked as he helped to row, still not sure what help he was going to offer.

Frenchie couldn't help but roll his eyes, "We need strategy. You were the one constantly telling us that we suck at being pirates. We have tried and failed to track him thus far. Every time we think we have a lead it's a decoy, he knows we are after him so we need the best to catch the slimy noseless bastard."

Izzy chuckled at the compliment but nodded. "Alright, you got a point. I'll take a look at the maps and all, see what we can figure out. I hate to think about splitting the crew but we may have to consider retrieving the *Queen Anne* and let Zheng captain it, two crews can track better than one."

Once on deck though Fang tackled Izzy into a bone crushing hug, Jim standing close by, glove on their left hand. "'Bout time you got back here."

Izzy touches his ring, once again securely knotted in his cravat at the hollow of his throat. The wind ruffles his hair, smelling of seaweed and salt as the *Revenge* skips across sparkling waves. Finding Ricky's hideaway wasn't nearly as difficult as they'd led him to expect. As a matter of fact, he couldn't help but feel that the whole thing—the rumours, the drama, the threat to all of pirate-kind, or at least the crew of the *Revenge*—had been a little oversold. The story about Buttons coming back as a seagull had sounded like nonsense, to be sure, but the slightly balding seagull following in the *Revenge's* wake for the past few days was compelling enough. Still, if he didn't know better, he might say it was all a bloody ruse to get him back on board…

"Alright, Iz?"

Frenchie smiles as Izzy turns to look at him, hands in his pockets, shoulders slumped with the boyish ease Izzy remembers from before everything went to shit. Before Bonnet left. Before the Kraken. Before Izzy faked his own bloody death because he thought it would be easier on everybody if he just… disappeared.

"Almost there now," Frenchie says, nodding vaguely out to sea. If their intel is right, the bastard is hiding out on an island just over the horizon—they'll see it soon enough. "Zheng's coming around with the rest of her ships, pincer movement, just like you said."

Frenchie pinches his fingers together, evocative as always. The *Revenge* is barely even necessary to the plan, truth be told. Zheng and her fleet are more than up to the task, the destruction Ricky's attack had wrought not nearly as total as he'd hoped. Less than a tenth of her vessels had been lost in the attack, with the rest still on their way across land and water. Destroying the entirety of her empire would have been an impressive coup—destroying only part of it was merely suicide.

Izzy winces at the thought, remembering Bonnet's words before their disas-

trous attempt to escape from the Republic. He touches the spot on his side where the bullet pierced him, still tender after all these months.

“You okay?” Jim swings down from the ratlines, landing next to Izzy with a soft thud. Their hand hovers over his back, uncertain. Izzy smiles, pats them on the shoulder. They relax, just slightly. It’s easy, somehow, being back with this crew. Like breathing.

“Yeah, kid, fine,” he says. He adjusts his sword belt, tilts his chin up as a shadow appears on the horizon, long and low. The island, exactly where they’d been told it would be. “Ready to take this fucker down, once and for all.”

Jim nods, determined, eyes shining.

“I guess after this you’ll be wanting to head back to the Republic?” Frenchie says, ostentatiously casual. “You know, enjoy your retirement?”

Izzy grins, turning back into the wind.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he says. “Never really was much chance of retirement in our line of work.”



Exquisite Corpse

The Exquisite Corpse is a sequential collaboration game with its roots in the surrealist art and poetry movements, wherein players take it in turns to blindly contribute to a single work.

In our game, the participants were shown the final three sentences of the preceding player's part. They then had twenty-four hours to complete their own ten sentence entry!

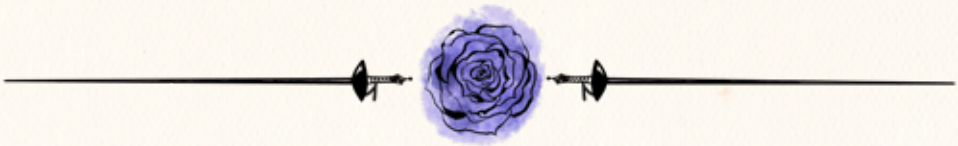
Two chains were made.

The first writer was also given a prompt word: *hurricane*



Exquisite Corpse Chain 1

Tags: Near drowning



#1 lustig

The storm reached them by mid-afternoon, just as Ed had predicted. They were woefully underprepared (just as Izzy had predicted), due to the crew's perpetual fucking reluctance to do any actual work – and Stede's cheery "Oh, I'm sure it won't be so bad, and we're having such a nice morning!" did not help, either.

When the clouds had appeared on the horizon, building quicker than the eye could follow, the rest of the crew finally seemed to grasp the seriousness of Ed's observation. They stopped smiling at Izzy's angry snarl, his hurried lurch, stride impeded by his wooden leg as he tried to get the deck in order more or less by himself.

But it was too little, too late.

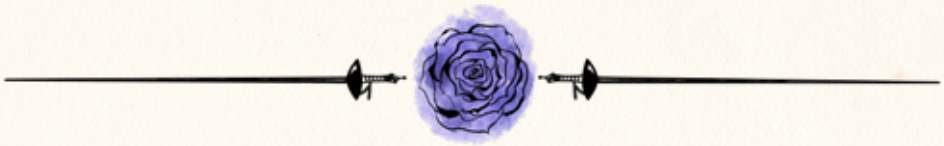
Neither Izzy nor Ed could really climb into the sails anymore, not with Izzy's leg and Ed's fucked knee – and while the deck was prepared well enough (hatches battened, all loose goods tucked safely away)... the rigging was *not*.

It barely took longer than a blink for the rain to follow the wind, and sleet blinded them in seconds, turning the deck into a slippery death trap.

"Izzy, below!" Ed bellowed, worried for a moment that the howling wind took

his words with him until he saw Izzy nod. The First Mate did not let go of the ropes as he hurried towards the Captain's cabin – when one of the sails came loose and the flaying cord hit him square in the chest, catapulting him into the air and over the railing with no chance to hold on.

"Man overboard!" Edward yelled, frantically looking for a sign, *any* sign of his First Mate, his *Izzy*, among the storm-beaten waves.



#2 Jam

There was nothing, but that couldn't be right—Izzy wasn't gone, Edward refused to believe he would be taken away so easily.

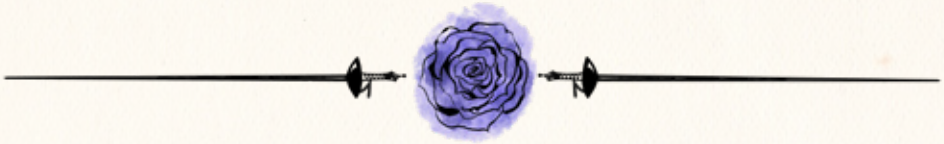
Evidently, the crew agreed, as there was suddenly a blond blur streaking towards the water, followed by a splash. So focused on the surface of the water, Edward hadn't noticed Jim tying a rope around Stede before pointing the man in the right direction and sending him into the water.

Desperate to help keep Stede and Izzy alive, Edward ran over to Jim to help hold the rope. Distantly, he heard Fang take over issuing orders to the crew, likely having realised that Ed would be out of commission until Izzy was safe.

It felt like Stede was submerged for an eternity, seconds ticking by like hours, but couldn't have been more than a minute by the time Stede's head poked above the waves, Izzy clutched to his chest. Relief bloomed in Ed's chest, so sudden that it was almost painful.

Jim and Ed both pulled on the rope with all of their strength, lifting Stede and Izzy onto the deck in record time.

As soon as he could get his legs under him, Stede laid Izzy down on his back, leaning down to listen for breath even as he still struggled to breathe himself—of course Izzy's lungs were full of water after his fall, and Ed was quick to kneel down with him and Stede, issuing instructions instinctively. "Stede, I need you to pinch his nose and breathe into his mouth to try and get air into his system; I'll do chest compressions to keep his heart pumping."



#3 Unopposablethumbs

Stede's hands shook as he obeyed, bending over Izzy's body, still and small on the deck. Pinching Izzy's nose shut with one hand, he used the other to tilt his head back, fingers stroking the too-cool skin of Izzy's jaw.

"One-two-three-four…" Ed counted in a steady staccato rhythm as he pressed down on Izzy's chest. "--thirty, Stede, breathe, now!"

Stede locked his mouth over Izzy's, parody of a kiss, Izzy's lips slack and cold under his as he exhaled once, twice, forcing air into Izzy's lungs.

"Come on, Izzy, don't fucking do this to me," Ed muttered, pressing down on Izzy's diaphragm again and again, counting in frantic monotone. Stede stared down at Izzy's pale face, water droplets glistening like jewels in his thick lashes, brow unnaturally smooth. And then, with a horrible rattle, Izzy began to cough, sea water pouring from his mouth as Ed rolled him to his side. Stede cradled his head, protecting it from the hard wood of the deck as Izzy finally opened his eyes, storm-green and dazed in his pallid face.

#4 Nick

“Oh, shit, he’s—he’s awake, Stede, Stede,” Ed hissed, urgency giving his words extra sting, as he shook Stede’s shoulder wildly, but Stede was well aware. He was, in fact, unable to peel his eyes away from Izzy’s, even as Izzy’s gaze began dragging sluggishly from Stede to Ed, and then to their surroundings, wrinkle in his brow deepening.

Izzy opened his mouth, as though to speak, but more seawater dribbled out instead, preceding another stomach-curdling cough that Stede could hardly bear to witness. He gave his best effort to stroke Izzy’s hair with his hand pinned between his skull and the deck, and Izzy’s eyes were creased with what could’ve been a smile as they opened again.

“Izzy, hey, mate, hey,” Ed said with unfiltered desperation, grasping for one of Izzy’s limp, pruned hands, and Stede had the privilege to see Izzy’s face marginally brighten as their hands clasped like puzzle pieces slotting together with a nigh inaudible squelch.

“Edward, give him time,” Stede whispered, a lance of worry spiking through him while he spectated Izzy’s facial gymnastics as Izzy grew lucid.

“Trying to give him fuckin’ time,” Ed replied, his tone frantic, “he’s—he’s our indestructible little fucker, he’s gotta be okay, he’s gotta be—”

“‘Course it’s you two,” Izzy rasped, the seawater droplets pearled on his haggard face sliding down with his words, “to fish me out of the brine.”

“Oh, Izzy,” Stede warbled and curled forward, the deck creaking below his knees as he scooped a soaked Izzy to his chest, which Izzy protested lightly but was ultimately too weak from his time spent dancing with death to avoid.

“Christ, thought we fuckin’ lost you, Iz,” Ed croaked and huddled in, squeezing Izzy’s hand tightly with another soft squelch as Izzy let out a waterlogged laugh between them.

#5 Lacuna

Stede left them like that, cuddled together on the deck as Ed rubbed Izzy vigorously for warmth, probably, and sprinted towards the galley, shrieking– ah, commanding magnanimously yet somehow also humbly and approachably, for Roach.

He skidded to a stop in the gloom of the ship's underbelly and panted hard to catch his breath. Roach dried his hands on his apron unhurriedly, waiting with an expectant look. "Did you find him, then?" he asked.

"*Yes*," wheezed Stede shrilly, "he was clinging to the anchor line, lord knows for how long. Now hop to it – we need soup, and blankets, and tea, and chocolate, and ooh is there any of that plumcake left? Only that's a bit dry without the custard. Do we have time to make custard?"

Roach, taking pity on the man, waved his cleaver in a gesture that was either dismissively menacing or expressively noncommittal. "Go on, shoo, out of my kitchen– I will meet you in your quarters with the tureen."

#6 AbbyRosebud

"And what if I say no?" Izzy asked, raising his chin in defiance at the chef.

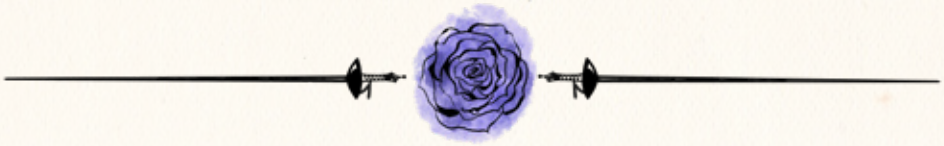
Roach turned and gave the older man a look. "Little man, do you really want to play these games?"

Izzy lowered his chin, knowing challenging Roach was a game better saved for later."You're lucky I like you," the older man grumbled, a blush tingeing his cheeks.

Roach chuckled, patting Izzy's cheek."I am very lucky, now get out of my kitchen I'll be at your quarters soon."

Izzy nodded and he leant in as if to kiss the man but instead turned on his heels leaving the kitchen before he decided to stay.

Izzy was smiling though, and still wasn't sure what was fully going on between the pair, what he did know though was he was excited for the treat that they would share soon.



#7 redshift

The knock at Izzy's door made him startle, ink bleeding out where he'd crushed the nib of his pen against the paper of the logbook. He'd sat on his bed waiting for long enough that he'd started to feel foolish about it; *soon* meant nothing and everything, a minute or an hour or some unspecified later time, whenever Roach decided he wanted to see Izzy again. Work was the solution, as it always was: no time to get in his own head about things when he had to use that space to concentrate on the appalling lack of basic inventory-keeping that he'd let slip by, distracted as he'd been lately.

The big black stain spreading over the line with *flour, coarse ground, ten sacks* hardly helps.

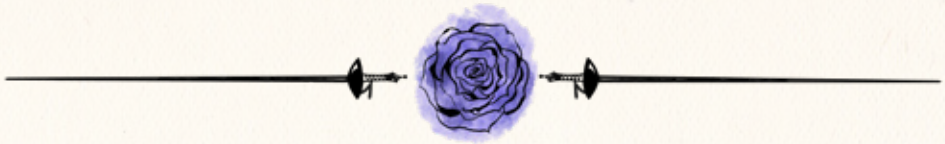
Izzy takes a breath, forcing his hand to still. He places the quill into the groove carved neatly into the wooden top of his desk – he'lll have to take his knife to the end later, and tidy any splits caused by his distraction.

The knock comes again. This time, Izzy answers.

"Hi," says Roach, pushing some sort of covered, sweet-smelling dish into Izzy's waiting hands, "brought you a present."

Izzy steps aside, smiling, and lets Roach in.

Exquisite Corpse Chain 2



#1 Sweven

"It's weird; I can feel the cold in my bones," Archie says, her breath white and steaming in the air. She twirls, peering at the light dusting of snow over the ocean with wide eyes.

"Yeah, no shit, we can all feel it in our bones," Jim grits out, shifting deeper into the warm embrace of Oluwande.

Oluwande clicks his tongue. "Don't start," he says, his voice trembling.

After a moment Jim nods, deflating. Arguing won't solve anything, not when they're bloody *stuck* here like this.

When they'd left the Caribbean, a hurricane had followed them, a *cursed* hurricane if Jim ever saw one, and one that landed them in the worst cold snap that any of the crew has ever experienced. With frozen fingers, Jim makes the sign of the cross yet again, a small flicker of warmth spreading in their chest as they watch Archie and Oluwande repeat the movement.

You could say a lot of things about Edward *fucking* Teach, but at least his sense of the weather had been better than Frenchie's and Izzy's combined.

#2 syrupwit

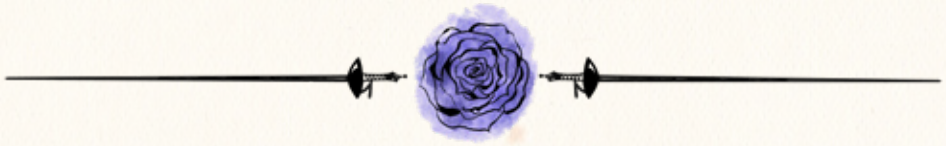
Speaking of Frenchie and Izzy, they're arguing about their next move. Even when he's explicitly occupying a leadership position, Frenchie can be quiet and diffident. But when he gets an idea about something, he doesn't let go of it, and he's started mouthing off.

"Yeah, we could do what you're suggesting, but it'd make no fuckin' sense," says Izzy. The cold makes him slow, which makes him frustrated, which makes him spit out each syllable like a broken tooth.

"It'd make plenty of sense. It would make, actually, the most sense."

"We'll freeze to death and you'll just be chattering away inanely, you—you absolute—"

"Going to call me a twat again?" says Frenchie, teeth chattering. "I know you know other words!"



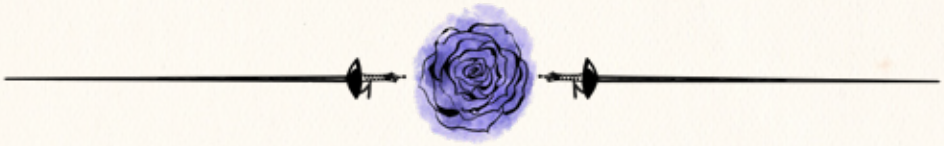
#3 AyashiTetsuko

Izzy was going to say something but decided against it; hurting each other was not going to help anyone at this very moment. The fact was that they were both stuck outside of the sauna with nothing to wear but a pair of shorts on a snowy night in January. They had been jumping and rubbing their arms, but it should not be long until…

"Right. Let's go there!" He pointed in the direction of a nearby house.

Despite his anger, Frenchie followed suit. The two men tiptoed across the yard and used all their remaining energy to jump through the fence. They made it across and did not waste time before knocking on the door.

It opened to reveal a young Asian woman standing in the doorway, wearing a fluffy maroon bathrobe.



#4 LaceratedLullabies

The woman looked them over as they caught their breath, taking in their myriad tattoos and the nondescript black bag tucked under Izzy's arm. She rolled her eyes.

"I suppose you'd better come in, then," she said, stepping aside to allow them entry. Judging by her familiar voice and the fact she was unsurprised by two criminals pitching up on her doorstep, Edward supposed this was the Queen – the only name he knew the safehouse owner by. Admittedly he hadn't expected her to be at said safehouse, but they weren't in a position to question it. "I trust you haven't brought too much trouble to my door? My partners are just starting to settle into this neighbourhood."

"We just need to lay low for a bit," Ed told her, fumbling through his pockets for his burner phone. "Just until a friend can pick us up." At his side, Izzy shook his head sharply, immediately working out which 'friend' he was referring to.

#5 little fingies

No amount of 'Eddie, please' could stop this from happening – no one was closer and more eager to rush to Ed's rescue at the drop of a hat – so Izzy didn't bother. Instead he spent the next half hour turning his lighter over in his fingers, nodding occasionally when Ed demanded he confirm details of progressively wilder tales of past exploits.

Then a powder blue Tesla with its fucking lights on turned into the alley and beeped twice.

"That's us," Ed said, slapping Izzy on the back and outright ignoring the shock of their companion.

Izzy watched Ed walk to the car and lean way too far into the driver's side window for a conversation. The headlights finally went out and Ed rounded to the passenger's side, calling out: "IZ!" on his way.

Izzy cursed and jogged up to the car, climbing in the back.

"Izzy, I was just telling Ed it's been ages!" Bonnet trilled from the driver's seat.

A water bottle and granola bar lay on the seat next to Izzy – was this for him? Did Bonnet stop to put snacks in a getaway car?

#5 Dracothelizard

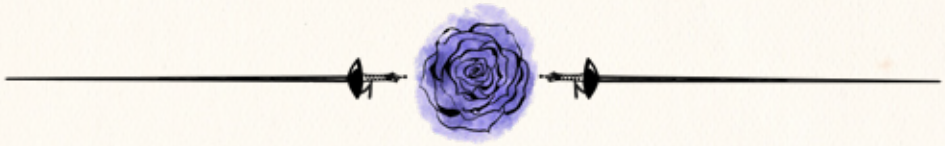
Ed passed Izzy the granola bar and smiled, ignoring the way Izzy glared at Bonnet. "C'mon, Izzy, eat something, you're clearly hangry."

Izzy took the granola bar and tore the wrapper open with his teeth while Bonnet *finally* drove away, after carefully checking his side-mirror, looking over his shoulder and flicking on the signal light. He munched on the bar, and fuck, it hit the spot, but he wasn't gonna tell Bonnet or Ed that.

"Did you get the goods?" Ed asked, still turned around in his seat to look at Izzy.

Izzy remained quiet as he put his seatbelt on first. "Yes, Ed, I got the goods, although don't bother asking for the details since I'm not going to give them to you!" It had been the most humiliating moment of his *life*, and he'd been hanging around Ed for decades.

"Awww, Izzy, c'mon!" Ed pouted, batting his eyes at Izzy pleadingly. "We always share everything!"



#6 sunspeckfreckle

Izzy clenched his teeth so hard they nearly cracked, a muscle in his jaw twitching with the strain, but the words wouldn't stay contained.

"Not everything," he forced out between stiff lips, his whole body a tight line of misery. Ed frowned, a confused furrow forming in his brow, and Izzy felt his jaw twitch again.

Like Ed didn't know damn well how Izzy felt about him.

"Am I missing something here, mate?"

Stede, clearly incapable of knowing when to leave well enough alone, chimed in, "I think what Izzy's trying to say is that he doesn't want to share himself with others. Just with you."

"Fuck off, Bonnet," Izzy snapped, but it was too late. Ed was already looking at Izzy in disbelief, ready to burst out laughing at the pathetic absurdity of it, his eyes full of– hope?

"Seems like I've been missing something pretty big, then," Ed murmured, moving closer, gaze falling to Izzy's lips like the countless times Izzy's had fallen to his.

#7 Han @chokedbyanangel

"I...I don't–" the habitual denial stumbled from Izzy's mouth, but petered out into silence as Ed reached for him.

Ed smiled, glittering down at him with amused tenderness, soft, and so unlike anything Izzy had ever expected to see turned in his direction. Hadn't dared to dream of.

Izzy closed his eyes. Ed's hands were gentle and warm where they cupped his face.

Izzy's heart thudded in his chest, and he couldn't bear to open his eyes and risk shattering this mirage.

"You do," Ed murmured, and kissed him.

Izzy lifted shaking hands to Ed's waist, and let his Captain enfold him in his arms. For a moment he forgot how to stand and breathe at the same time.

He opened his eyes, and remembered.



Standalone Fics and Transformations



About this section

Fanfiction: the thing that gathers us all here today! Innately transformative, many of our works have been further transformed by art, podfic, or translation.

We have fourteen fics for you to enjoy, from 500 to 3000 words. They are arranged by increasing rating, from G to spicy E, with the final section being anything that falls under AO3's required warnings.

Enjoy!



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Fic Section - G-Rated



Where Mine Belong

Written by LazyMedusa

Rating: G

Beta credit: Despising_Tories

Summary:

Stede (and the rest of the crew) tries to make Izzy's birthday special.

"This will make a simply darling birthday present for Alma!"

Around Izzy, pained whimpers fill the salt air as the crew of the Revenge go about the business of ransacking the English ship. Bonnet flashes a bright smile at the naval officer they've tied to the mast. The man hacks up bloody spital, narrowly missing Bonnet's silk slipper. Bonnet wrinkles his nose and shimmies back as he pockets the shiny trinket he's been admiring.

"Looks great, love!" Edward calls before getting back to work, helping Feeney light the sails on fire.

"Waste of saleable plunder, you ask me," Izzy grumbles.

Bonnet purses his lips, but doesn't actually say, 'Well, I *didn't* ask you.'

Look how far they've come.

"Thinking of someone else is never a waste, Israel. Haven't you ever had a birthday gift you truly treasured?"

That look on Stede's face always irks Izzy, halfway between pity and condescension. An idea flutters to life in the dark recesses of his brain. He shrugs. "Never had a birthday."

"Never had a… What do you mean?"

"What I said, some of us grew up with work to be getting on with. The day you're born isn't worth much when you're scraping about for food and rent."

"Well, we're not *scraping about* now, are we?"

"We're *pirates*, Bonnet, we don't *do* birthdays."

Bonnet's eyebrows climb. In the pinched tone that means he thinks he's being subtle, he asks, "And, if you *were* to have a birthday, Izzy, what would your ideal day be?"

"Well…" Izzy strokes his goatee. "There's supposed to be cake, right?"

Bonnet nods eagerly.

"Well, it'd have to be ginger… or passionfruit, maybe." He sighs, drawn out so Bonnet will notice. "Only get those from Mad Sal at the Republic though… And I suppose we'd want something so Fang can string up those flowers he likes." He glances at Wee John and Edward. "Maybe some of Feeney's fireworks to finish off the night."

"And, out of curiosity, when is your birthday again?" Bonnet shakes his head. "Oh never mind, I'll just check with Ed."

"No!" Izzy grabs his sleeve. "No wait, let's not bother Edward while he's busy." He curls his lips and runs some quick numbers on sail times. "It's a week on Tuesday, as a matter of fact."

Bonnet's lips dance as he fails to fight back a grin. "Oh, well! You never know what might happen, do you?"

Idiot.

Over the next week, Izzy watches the Revenge become a buzzing hive of synchronised activity. Or, you know, an actual, functioning pirate ship. He lurks in the shadowy stairway leading to the hold. Groans—pained voices and shifting crates—fill the air.

“Fuck. That better not be another splinter.”

“...see why we need to move everything—”

“Don’t just shift it from one side to the other please! I’ve told you, we need to create a *space* and this is the only room big enough.”

They make landfall. Izzy pretends not to notice when Stede sneaks off with Roach, all sharp whispers and clutching a shopping list as long as his arm.

Izzy takes the opportunity to meet with Jackie and finally unload the rolls of silks that’ve been cluttering the hold for months. Fuckin’ hazard, they were. He meets with his contacts, thrashing out deals for the supplies the Revenge needs and for the plunder they have to unload.

Roach sneaks back aboard with loaded arms and Izzy pretends not to see that either. Ginger and passionfruit permeate the ship.

Tuesday rolls around.

The Revenge’s main deck is eerily quiet. No bickering, no singing, no gossiping.

Izzy feels a pang of unease.

He stomps down to the bowels of the ship.

The hold is tidier than it's ever been, all the crates neatly loaded, stacked and secured. Izzy's heart flutters in delight.

"Surprise!"

Bonnet explodes from behind one of the bigger crates, remarkably unconcerned at startling a man holding a sword. Edward and the crew emerge more cautiously, but crowd around to clap Izzy on the shoulder and offer him birthday wishes.

"The sea witch's blessings upon ye."

Jim bumps his shoulder. "Congratulations on not dying, I guess."

Spriggs shimmies forward, "From all of us," he says softly, and presses a parcel, wrapped in paper dotted with caricatures, into Izzy's hands.

Bonnet puts a hand on the small of Izzy's back and bustles him up to the main deck. The crew follows behind like a trail of rowdy, murderous ducklings.

Ropes have been carefully coiled, tied in place instead of sprawling across the deck ready to trip someone overboard. The deck is freshly swabbed. *Gleaming perfection*. Izzy could almost shed a tear. The pile of *absolute crap* that's been sitting about since the Dutch raid last month is finally gone, cleared away to make space for a table piled with snacks and tankards.

The crew flow around Izzy like a tide, to descend on Roach's offerings. A birthday cake, topped with passionfruit wedges, sits in pride of place.

Hours later, as the party winds to a soft, hazy close, Izzy leans against the railing. He strokes the hilt of the knife Ed gave him for his *actual* birthday.

Eight months ago.

Before they stumbled across Bonnet and his band of misfits.

Edward comes to rest beside him. "Enjoy your birthday?"

Izzy levels his captain a steady gaze. His heart hammers a little faster—guilt? Or fear? Fear that Edward really has forgotten.

Ed grins, mask slipping.

Izzzy snorts. “As if I don’t know what a fuckin’ birthday is.”

“Good shout, though. Needed something to keep them busy.”

“Keeping the ship afloat should keep them busy.”

“Yeah, but…” Edward shrugs.

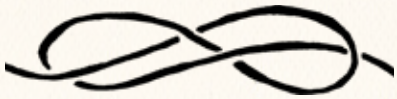
A smile tugs Izzy’s mouth. His chest feels lighter, the weight of responsibility for this underprepared crew temporarily lessened. “Ship’s looking good.”

“Never better,” Edward agrees. He presses a kiss to Izzy’s temple—“Happy Not-Birthday Iz”—then saunters off.

Izzy turns, watching waves crash against the hull as he touches trembling fingers to the warmth left by Edward’s lips.

Where mine belong

Written by LazyMedusa



Translated into Spanish by Jackeline Harkness

Título: donde los míos pertenecen

Clasificación: G

Sinopsis: Stede (y el resto de la tripulación) intentan hacer que el cumpleaños de Izzy sea especial.

"¡Este será un regalo de cumpleaños sencillamente maravilloso para Alma!"

En torno a Izzy, quejidos adoloridos llenaban el aire salado mientras la tripulación del Revenge continúa ocupada en saquear el barco Inglés. Bonnet le dedica una brillante sonrisa al oficial naval que tenían atado al mástil. El hombre escupió una masa sanguinolenta, apenas aparte de las zapatillas de seda de Bonnet. Bonnet arrugó la nariz y se apartó un poco, guardando en su bolsillo la chuchería brillante que había estado admirando.

"¡Luce de maravilla, amor!" Edward gritó antes de volver a su trabajo, ayudando a Feeney a prender fuego a las velas.

"Total desperdicio de botín bueno para vender, si me preguntan," protestó Izzy.

Bonnet torció los labios, pero al menos no dijo, “Bueno, no te pregunté.”

Cuán lejos han llegado.

“Pensar en alguien más nunca es un desperdicio, Israel. ¿Nunca has tenido un regalo de cumpleaños que realmente atesoraras?”

La expresión en el rostro de Stede siempre irrita a Izzy, una combinación de lástima y condescendencia. Y entonces, una idea brotó en los oscuros rincones de su cerebro. Se encogió de hombros. “Nunca he tenido un cumpleaños.”

“Nunca has tenido... ¿Qué quieres decir?”

“Lo que dije, algunos de nosotros crecimos ya con un trabajo que completar. El día en que naciste no vale mucho cuando apenas puedes arreglártelas para tener comida y pagar la renta.”

“Bueno, ahora podemos *arreglárnoslas* para mucho más, ¿no es así?”

“Somos *piratas*, Bonnet, no celebramos cumpleaños.”

Las cejas de Bonnet se alzaron. En ese tono que delataba que creía que estaba siendo sutil, preguntó, “Y, si alguna vez tuvieras un cumpleaños, Izzy, ¿cómo sería tu día ideal?”

“Bueno...” Izzy acarició su barba. “Se supone que debe haber tarta, ¿no?”

Bonnet asintió con la cabeza, entusiasmado.

“Bueno, tendría que ser de jengibre... o fruta de la pasión, tal vez.” Lanzó un suspiro, largo, para que Bonnet lo notara. “Esos solo se pueden conseguir con Mad Sal en la República... Y supongo que necesitaríamos algo para que Fang pueda colgar esas flores que le gustan.” Mira a Wee John y Edward. “Tal vez unos de esos fuegos artificiales de Feeney para acabar bien la noche.”

“Y, por pura curiosidad, ¿cuándo es tu cumpleaños?” Bonnet meneó la cabeza. “Olvídalo, le preguntaré a Ed.”

“¡No!” Izzy sujetó su manga. “No, espera, no es necesario molestar a Edward cuando está ocupado.” Torció los labios e hizo números rápidamente en cuanto a tiempos de navegación. “A una semana desde el martes, de hecho.”

Los labios de Bonnet ejecutaron toda una danza mientras intentaba contener

una sonrisa. “Oh, bueno. Nunca sabes lo que puede pasar, ¿verdad?”

Idiota.

Durante la siguiente semana, Izzy observó al Revenge convertirse en una colmena zumbante de actividades sincronizadas. O, bueno, un jodido barco pirata funcional. Se ocultaba en las sombras observando, desde las escaleras que conducían a la bodega. Quejas (voces adoloridas y cajas arrastrándose) llenaban el aire.

“Carajo. Más vale que esa no sea otra astilla.”

“...ves por qué tenemos que mover todo...”

“¡No solo lo muevan de un lado al otro, por favor! Les he dicho que tenemos que crear un *espacio y* este es el único cuarto lo bastante amplio.”

Llegaron a tierra. Izzy pretendió no darse cuenta cuando Stede se escabulló con Roach, en medio de murmullos y apretando una lista de compras tan larga como su brazo.

Izzy aprovechó la oportunidad de encontrarse con Jackie y finalmente descargar los rollos de seda que habían estado abarrotando la bodega durante meses. Un maldito peligro, es lo que eran. Se reunió con sus contactos, negociando tratos por las provisiones que el Revenge necesitaba y por el botín que debían descargar.

Roach se escabulló de regreso al barco con los brazos llenos, e Izzy pretendió no darse cuenta de eso tampoco. El aroma de jengibre y fruta de la pasión inundaban el barco.

El martes llegó.

La cubierta principal del Revenge estaba abrumadoramente silenciosa. Nada de peleas, nada de canciones, nada de chismorreos.

Izzy sintió una punzada de inquietud.

Bajó a las entrañas del barco.

La bodega estaba más limpia y ordenada que nunca, todos los contenedores pulcramente cargados, apilados y asegurados. El corazón de Izzy danzaba de felicidad.

"¡Sorpresa!"

Bonnet explotó de detrás de uno de los contenedores de mayor tamaño, impresionantemente despreocupado de sobresaltar a un hombre armado con una espada. Edward y la tripulación emergieron con más cuidado, pero se arremolinaron en torno a Izzy para darle palmaditas en el hombro y ofrecer sus buenos deseos de cumpleaños.

"Que las bendiciones de la bruja del mar sean contigo."

Jim chocó su hombro. "Felicidades por no morirte, supongo."

Spriggs se acercó tímidamente, "De parte de todos nosotros," dijo suavemente y le entregó un paquete, envuelto en papel lleno de caricaturas.

Bonnet puso su mano en la espalda baja de Izzy y lo condujo a la cubierta principal. La tripulación siguiéndoles como una hilera de escandalosos patitos asesinos.

Las cuerdas habían sido cuidadosamente enrolladas, atadas en su lugar, en lugar de estar regadas por toda la cubierta como esperando a hacer que alguien tropezara y cayera por la borda. La cubierta estaba recién trapeada. *Perfectamente brillante*. Izzy casi podría derramar una lágrima. La pila de *absoluta mierda* que había estado regada desde la redada sobre los Holandeses el mes anterior finalmente había desaparecido, guardada para abrir espacio

para una mesa llena con bocadillos y tarros.

La tripulación fluyó alrededor de Izzy como una marea, descendiendo sobre lo que había preparado Roach. Una tarta de cumpleaños, decorada con rebanadas de fruta de la pasión, ocupaba el sitio de honor.

Horas después, mientras la fiesta se adormilaba rumbo a un suave y nebuloso final, Izzy se apoyaba sobre la baranda. Acariciaba la empuñadura de la daga que Ed le había dado por su verdadero cumpleaños.

Ocho meses antes.

Antes de que tropezaran con Bonnet y su panda de inadaptados.

Edward fue a reposar a su lado. “¿Disfrutaste de tu cumpleaños?”

Izzy tornó su mirada hacia su capitán. Su corazón palpitaba un poco más rápido... ¿culpa? ¿O miedo? Miedo de que Edward realmente se hubiera olvidado.

Ed sonrió, dejando caer su máscara.

Izzy resopló. “Com si no supiera lo que es un jodido cumpleaños.”

“Buena decisión. Necesitábamos algo para mantenerlos ocupados.”

“Mantener el barco a flote debería mantenerlos ocupados.”

“Sí, pero...” Edward se encogió de hombros.

Una sonrisa tiró de la boca de Izzy. Su pecho se sentía más ligero, el peso de la responsabilidad por esta tripulación tan poco preparada temporalmente aligerado. “El barco luce bien.”

“Nunca antes mejor,” Edward coincidió. Depositó un beso sobre la sien de Izzy, “Feliz no-cumpleaños, Iz,” y después se alejó con paso tranquilo.

Izzy se tornó, observando las olas azotar contra el casco mientras sus dedos temblorosos acariciaban la calidez dejada por los labios de Edward.

Pillow Talk

Written by AbbyRosebud

Rating: G

Beta credit: Clockwork

Summary:

Izzy is still in and out after being shot by Ricky. Jim and Frenchie both are taking the near loss of their first mate with some difficulty but talking it through as a crew does tend to help with hard to process emotions.

Izzy nearly died after Ricky shot him. The crew was all left in various states of dismay as Izzy had passed out and was, for a moment, assumed dead in Edward's arms. That's when it all started. When Jim snapped at Ed and then tore into him for freezing up instead of jumping into survival mode.

As time passed Jim would eventually apologize to Ed, but their own panicked reaction to Izzy bleeding out was definitely different to the captains. For Jim watching Izzy struggling for life was like a dagger being stabbed into their chest. A tightness they hadn't felt since the slaughter of their entire family.

Frenchie was the first person to get through to Jim.

Izzy was mostly out of consciousness, fighting off infection and working to regain blood and heal. Archie and Oluwande had tried but Jim just kept telling

them they were just worried and that they would be around more once Izzy was awake. Neither of Jim's partners wanted to push them in such a fragile place so they gave them space.

Frenchie on the other hand pushed back. The fourth day came and Frenchie entered the captain's room with a tray with two bowls and a determined attitude.

"You may be refusing to leave this room and sending away everyone but Roach but I am not the rest of the crew. I'm not gonna listen to your threats and I will make sure you eat in the process too."

Jim glared at their crew mate, but the glare didn't last long when the smell of Roach's amazing noodle soup hit them and their bastard of a stomach betrayed them when it growled.

Frenchie chuckled, pulling a second chair up beside Izzy's bed so he could see both Jim and Izzy from his spot. "See, I came with a peace offering," he teased, holding the tray out so Jim could take the bowl.

Jim grabbed the bowl as they settled back in the chair. "Thank you," they said softly, holding the steaming bowl under their chin and just breathing in the steam while it cooled.

Frenchie settled in a similar position, instead blowing on a spoonful of soup before slurping in the flavourful broth and trying to contain his smile at the side eye that was shot his way.

The pair sat there in a mostly comfortable silence. Mostly because Frenchie was still slurping his soup and Jim, after a while of enduring the silence, finally spoke.

"Are you slurping to push my limits or what?"

They didn't fully snap but there was an attitude clear in their voice.

Frenchie shrugged, slowly slurping again and when Jim glared at him he finally spoke directly to them. "I kind of hoped it would annoy you enough to start talking."



Art by eros_the_artist

Jim rolled their eyes. “You realize you could have just asked me a question to get me to talk, ya?”

“Hmm, would you though? Cause Archie told me you were basically a mute to even her.” He pointed out sitting back, finally eating his soup without slurping.

They rolled their eyes, not appreciating being called out for their behavior. “Why do I need to talk? I am here to help take care of Izzy who is not talking.” Jim pointed out, still eating though.

“You know, some people believe that those unconscious can still hear the conversation around them.” Frenchie continued to talk though before Jim could try to argue. “Also, maybe talking about what happened is exactly what you need to work through what happened nearly five days ago,” he pointed out.

“We almost lost him, Frenchie. That’s all there is to say.” Jim however averted their eyes from the other man watching Izzy instead, doing something they had been for days. Focusing to watch the rise and fall of Izzy’s chest, reminding themself that Izzy was alive and breathing.

“Except we both know he is more than just another crew mate to you.” He said it so plainly but there was no implication. It was just the truth of the matter.

Jim gave Frenchie a look, their voice defensive. “I am not in love with Izzy.”

Frenchie shook his head, “Never said you were mate. I said that he was more than just a crew member. Lots of people matter without being romantically involved.”

The pair fell silent, the statement still hanging in the air between them as they finished their soup both pirates now watching the rise and fall of the first mate’s chest.

Jim breathed deeply watching Izzy’s eyes move a bit behind his eyelids. Their voice was soft when they finally spoke. “He’s the closest thing to a father figure I have. I can’t lose him too.”

Frenchie had thought Jim’s answer would go along that line and he scooted closer to them reaching a hand out as comfort. “Well, he is alive and Roach

said going into day five with no large sign of infection is a great start."

Jim nodded their head, setting their hand in Frenchie's.

"Yeah it is a good sign." They agreed on that, letting their eyes close for a few moments and Jim chuckled. "How did we get here, Frenchie? I mean fuck we hated this man when we joined with Queen Anne's crew. I mean literally we were trying to kill him when Stede abandoned Ed the first time and now…" They huff, shaking their head because words are just too hard.

"Now we spend hours crying over him. Hours fearing we might have to say goodbye to a man who has become our dearest friend," Frenchie supplied, still holding onto Jim's hand but his eyes were on Izzy.

Jim nodded in agreement and they could tell Frenchie needed to talk about this too. "I'm not the best with emotions but, you're here for me to talk to about the Izzy situation and I am here for you. Whatever you need to say. The crew got close in the kraken era but you and Iz… Your bond is different just like mine and his."

Frenchie snorted softly because that was in part true. He had gotten close to Izzy when Ed had turned against them all. Frenchie was watching Izzy's face as he spoke. "I would make him let me tend to his wounds. Especially his foot. Every time he lost another toe I would see him try to hide the limp, see the betrayal, fear and pain in his eyes and each time I would bring him a cup of tea and push him to let me tend to it." He smiled softly. "Told him it was nice to see he was capable of being vulnerable with someone."

Jim listened to Frenchie talk and they weren't sure if what they were coming to connect the dots on was as obvious to the man as it was to them. "How did he react to you saying that? Seems like a good way to get stabbed." Jim teased.

"He shoved me, and basically said no one else was allowed to know." He laid his arm on the bed they sat beside his hand nearly touching Izzy's. "The day he cried in front of all of us when you confronted him about the abuse? That wasn't the first time I saw him cry. It's still weird to me that I actually can say I know him. Like I know Israel, not just a pirate or crew mate. "

Jim nodded and they found it sweet but also so sad to see the way Frenchie wanted to touch their friend but didn't. "Does he know?"

Frenchie looked up at Jim, confused. “Does he know what?”

Jim rolled their eyes at that. “That you’re in love with him?”

Frenchie bit his lip and he looked away from Jim, his eyes trained on a part of the blanket that was over Izzy’s chest. “Not sure what you’re talking about…”

Jim sighed, reaching out to put their hand on Frenchie’s. “It’s not a bad thing to have feelings for him. I know he isn’t the most open person but, he clearly likes you. Otherwise he wouldn’t have let you into his world.”

Frenchie breathed deeply, looking back at Izzy’s face. “Just seems like a bad time to put a label on how he makes me feel.”

“Almost losing someone is the perfect time to consider what is most important in life.” Jim pointed out. “Christ, Archie and I had our first kiss right after we cut off Izzy’s leg. We were talking about how he was our dick no matter how much of a pain in the ass he’s been and it just happened.” Jim admitted and when Frenchie started to laugh it brought them some comfort.

“You kissed in front of Izzy while he was feverish, infected and freshly amputated? That is a ballsy move, Mate.” He teased, smiling at them even as he looked back at Izzy. “When he pulls through this, I’ll talk to him about it.” Frenchie promised, mostly to himself but also to Jim. If nothing else, they can help keep him accountable.

Jim nodded. “Good, because we’ve been through so much shit you deserve to have something going in your favor.”

What neither of them knew was that Izzy had woken up toward the end of Frenchie’s confession. He knew that he had similar feelings for the younger man but felt jumping in mid semi private conversation was in poor taste. Instead he stayed laying there with his eyes shut, just listening to two of his favorite people speak about him and the life they as a crew have been living.

The pair settled into a comfortable silence, both just sat back watching to make sure Izzy was still with them. Their motives for wanting the man around may be different but they both were prepared to go to the ends of the earth to keep him alive and thriving.



Art by eros_the_artist

When the pair finally settled into not speaking Izzy finally decided to speak, his eyes still closed.

"You do realize how creepy it is to watch someone sleep right?" Izzy's voice was scratchy but there and he winced when the pair exclaimed.

"Thank Fuck." and an excited, "IZZY!" From Jim and Frenchie.

Izzy couldn't help the smile that pulled at his lips. "Alright twats, volume control."

His eyes opened, looking at the pair who looked like they hadn't been sleeping right and he shifted. Or at least tried, brushing his fingers against Frenchie's hand that was still on the bed.

Jim grinned at the small touch. "Oh shut it old man. We're just happy to see you."

Frenchie blushed but hooked his finger with Izzy's as Jim sassed him. They were right tho, Frenchie was just happy to see Izzy with his eyes open.

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Fic Section - T-Rated



cursed

Written by redshift

Rating: T

Beta credit: stephsvoid

Summary:

Stede's stressed. Ed's bemused. Izzy's having the time of his life. It's an Izzy Fuckery, Baybee

"Ed, I have something terrible to tell you."

Ed looks up from the embroidery hoop he's been contemplating pitching off the side of the ship for the last hour. "What's that, mate?"

Stede looks wretched, wringing his hands together. Even his hair is out of place, the curls dishevelled. It's been a nice day, is the thing. Everyone's aboard, they're fully stocked after stopping in at market a few days ago, and the weather is clear and fine. There's nothing that can have gone wrong.

"Izzy's in love with me," Stede blurts.

The idea is so ridiculous that Ed doesn't even try not to laugh.

Stede's wretchedness becomes more indignant. "I'm serious!"

"Okay, mate, you're serious." Ed sits forward, setting his embroidery on the cushions at his hip. He passes a hand over his mouth, forcing his smile aside, and then steeples his fingers in front of his face. "Izzy. In love with you. Definitely."

“Oh, Ed, it’s all my fault.” Stede tugs at his curls, which answers the mystery of what had happened to get him so unkempt.

“Hey,” Ed says. He reaches out a hand and Stede comes to him immediately, collapsing down onto the little chaise and burying his face in Ed’s shoulder. “Look, mate. It doesn’t seem... that bad?”

Stede sits up, fixing Ed with a betrayed look. “Ed, you don’t *understand*. If it was just... attraction, it wouldn’t–” He cuts himself off, colour pinking the tops of his cheeks. “The point! The point is, Ed, that I misspoke in front of a witch when we stopped in for supplies, and now Izzy’s been *cursed*!”

That’s... a lot to take in.

“Cursed?” Ed asks. He’ll circle back to the rest in a minute, when he’s tackled what seems to be the crux of the problem. “By a witch?”

“On the island, yes,” Stede says, flapping a hand at him. “Do keep up!”

“Cursed to...”

“To fall in love with me! Oh Ed, I feel terrible for the poor man. Just imagine it, having all that choice taken away from you!”

“Sounds shit,” Ed agrees. It does, actually, sounds a bit fucking nightmarish. And Izzy *would* hate it, if it was actually happening to him. The only trouble is, curses aren’t real, and the only witches Ed’s known are the ones who’ll sort out your ailments with a trip to the hedgerow. He strokes his hand soothingly over Stede’s spine.

After a moment, when Stede seems to have calmed down a little under the influence of Ed’s touch, Ed asks, “So it’s not the you bit that’s the problem, then? Or the Izzy bit?” Or the love bit, which... can wait. Maybe something to tackle after a bit of kissing and a glass of wine, when Stede’s nice and cheerful and talkative.

“Of course it’s the curse bit that’s the problem! And it’s my *fault*.”

Ed pulls him back in, nestling Stede’s distraught face against his shoulder. He kisses Stede’s rumpled curls. “We’ll sort it out, don’t you worry. Izzy’s the

most stubborn fucker I've ever met. He's not gonna let some curse tell him how he feels for long."

"I hope you're right." Stede purses his lips, just barely brushing Ed's skin through his thin shirt. "He *smiled* at me, Ed. It was very unnerving."

This is a very serious situation. Ed kisses Stede's hair again, and hides his own grin in the unruly curls.

Izzy's on the quarterdeck when Ed goes looking for him. He's frowning at Fang, who's holding court on the deck below with Lucius on his knee and the Swede hung in the rigging nearby, listening raptly to whatever he's saying.

"Okay, Iz?"

Izzy flicks him a glance, shifting his weight so the shoulder nearest Ed tips back. It's as good as an engraved invitation, and Ed takes it gladly; he leans himself against the railing with his back to the deck below, tucking his thumbs into his belt. His elbow brushes Izzy's side and then rests there so that Ed can feel the way his body moves as he breathes. It's nice, being close again.

"Useless twats," Izzy grumbles, jerking his chin in the direction of the gathering going on below. He's almost smiling, the harsh lines of his face smoothed out even as he keeps up a frown.

"You'd think they'd have had enough sitting around on shore leave," Ed agrees. He moves his foot, tapping his soft shoe against the side of Izzy's boot. "Hey. Ask you something?"

Izzy raises an eyebrow at him. "Yeah?"

"Did anything weird happen on the island?"

"Bonnet paid through the nose for some flour," Izzy says. "Pretty sure there's

weevils in it already. I had Roach pick up more, just in case. Why?"

No use beating around the bush, or whatever. "Stede says you're in love with him."

The corner of Izzy's mouth twitches. "Oh yeah?"

"Something about a witch, and a love spell?"

"Magic isn't real," Izzy says. His lips purse and flatten like he's biting the inside of his mouth, and Ed watches in dawning delight as Izzy's eyes start to crinkle at the corners. "Dyed sand and horse piss, that's all it is."

"He seems pretty sure. Said you told him his hair was nice."

"I'm a man of hidden depths," Izzy tells him. "I've taken an interest in hair-care."

He gives up on hiding his smile, the expression spreading out over his face to match the glee Ed's sure is written all over his own. There's a beautiful glimmer of mischief in his eyes, the sort that makes him look twenty years younger and a life of horrors lighter, more like the man he always used to be in private.

"Bollocks you have," Ed says, beaming.

"You don't think I could pull off curls? I could pull off curls."

Ed laughs, leaning in. "You'd look like a fancy lady."

Izzy bats Ed's hand away before he can get his fingers in the long feathery bits that flick out above Izzy's collar, all tempting and silvery, curled up like a beckoning finger.

"Twat," he says fondly, smacking Ed's hand again. "If you–"

Something catches his attention on deck. He goes taut, gaze snapping away from Ed and mouth freezing mid word; not hung open for catching flies, but just paused there, suspended. The master of the big house where Ed's mother worked had kept dogs. Rangy things, red-coated and keen-eyed, who could snatch a bird right out of the sky. As Izzy turns his attention to the deck, his whole body following the direction of his interest, Ed has a fleeting thought of Izzy launching himself after whatever poor creature he'd decided to hunt.

"You don't think I could pull off curls? I could pull off curls."

"You'd look like a fancy lady."



Art by LaceratedLullabies

Of course, it's not that often they have creatures aboard, the gulls that hover around Stede's weird bird guy excepted. Ed's never been much for animals. Hell, even the gulls kind of give him the willies. He leans over the rail himself, following the direction of Izzy's keen gaze just as Izzy lifts one hand away from the wood and waggles his fingers, his face collapsing into a weird, soppy expression Ed's never seen on him before. It looks wrong. It looks *weird*.

On the deck below, Stede half-lifts his own hand to wave back before blanching and scurrying off with his shoulders hunched up around his head. *Hunted*.

The unsettling expression on Izzy's face resolves itself into something much more familiar. His soft jaw firms, bringing with it a lopsided smirk that pulls the mischief right back into his eyes, and he all but tosses his head as he settles back in with his hip propped against the wood.

"You fucker," Ed says, admiringly. "You've been... you're fucking with him! On purpose!"

"Dunno what you mean," Izzy says. He sniffs, rubs a knuckle under his nose and comes up stone faced but for the laugh lines framing his sparkling eyes. "I can't help myself around him, it's that pure animal magnetism of his. I'm hard as a rod, Edward, I don't know how you get through the day."

He delivers this all in such a flat monotone that it's all Ed can do not to piss himself laughing about it.

"I'm gonna tell him," Ed says, when he's got a hold of himself again. Izzy's watching him laugh with a fond twist to his lips and his head tilted ever so slightly to one side. "He's worried about your... magic virtue, or something."

"Spoilsport."

"I am." Ed shifts his weight onto his good leg and reaches out, pushing his knuckles against Izzy's shoulder. Izzy moves easily with the touch, and Ed leaves his fist pressed to the leather for a beat longer than he needs to. "I'm gonna tell him. It's gonna break his heart, Iz."

"What about my virtue?"

“I reckon it’ll survive.”

Izzy snorts and pushes himself upright off the rail. He stops just in front of Ed, giving him a sly, playful look.

“You can tell him my virtue remains intact,” he says. His voice drops, a little lower and huskier than normal. “Cheap gin and mysterious fucking powders only affect it on special occasions.”

Something strange is happening to Ed’s belly. Izzy smells like smoke, and his voice has always scratched comfortably at Ed’s spine, but his smile and his closeness and the way he’s *playing* have made all of the other forgotten parts of Ed’s body wake up in response.

“Yeah?” he says, and only realises Izzy’s gaze is fixed somewhere south of his eyes when Izzy looks up to meet them.

“Just a bit of fun,” Izzy says, still in that low, amused tone. He smirks, lifting his chin. “Besides, your boyfriend’s kind of cute when he’s flustered.”

Talk Surgery

Written by rimbaudofficial

Rating: T

Beta credit: little fingies

Summary:

Izzy likes to talk to Roach while he's working. Little does Izzy know that the conversations themselves are an experimental form of medicine Roach calls talk surgery — or that Roach is going to save his relationship with Frenchie several times.

The galley was a nice, quiet place for Izzy to spend time, constant clattering and exclamations from Roach aside. No one thought to look for him there, and he could have coffee.

And he could talk to Roach.

"I just don't understand what happened to Ed," Izzy sighed. "Two seconds with Bonnet and he's asking me to fucking tie bows into his beard. Bows! Blackbeard!"

"Mm," Roach said, chopping carrots more quickly than Izzy had been aware a person could.

"He changed completely," Izzy continued. "He's a different person now, and I don't know what I'm supposed to do about it."

"Is he all that different?" Roach asked.

“Yes,” Izzy said. “He’s not like this, usually. And he’s not like the Kraken, either. He’s Blackbeard. Or he was. He isn’t anymore.”

“Mm,” Roach said.

“He’s out in public being Ed, when he only ever used to be Ed around me. And CJ, I guess, when he was around. God rest his soul.”

“Think I saw him in the Republic a few weeks back, actually,” Roach said.

“That would make sense,” Izzy said. “Fucker’s impossible to kill. Anyway. I don’t understand how Ed can be the person he is in private all the time now.”

“Yeah,” Roach said, having moved on to celery. “Rough.”

“I guess I’m like that,” Izzy said. “With the singing.”

“You’re nice to Frenchie in public, too, now,” Roach pointed out.

“That’s different,” Izzy said. “The crew would fucking murder me if I weren’t nice to the man I share a bed with.”

“Likely,” Roach said. “You’re sure that’s all it is?”

Izzy looked over, shaken out of his reprieve.

“What? Of course I’m fucking sure that’s all it is,” he said. “What are you making, anyway? It smells amazing.”

“Mirepoix,” Roach said. “It’s a soup base.”

“This crew and fucking soup,” Izzy said. “I’ll never understand you lot.”

“Mm,” Roach said, tipping the celery into the pot.

Izzy took his coffee in silence.

“Nothing to say today, little man?” Roach asked.

Izzy grunted.

"That's all right," Roach said. "I'll have another cup for you if you want it."

Izzy grunted again, and sat at the galley table, moodily drinking his coffee. Time went by.

"Did you know about this?" Izzy asked.

"I don't know what you mean," Roach said.

"Don't fuck about," Izzy said. "Did you know Frenchie was upset with me?"

"No," Roach said, "but I could have guessed."

"How the fuck could you have guessed?"

"Depends on what he's upset about," Roach said.

"He thought we were *boyfriends*," Izzy sneered. "Boyfriends! I'm fifty-seven goddamn years old. I don't have a boyfriend."

"Ah," Roach said.

"I sleep in his bed, and it's a damn nice bed, and obviously I'm nice to him, and I got him stupid fucking strings for his stupid fucking lute, but *boyfriends* is where I draw the line," Izzy said. He took an angry sip of his coffee.

"I'm pretty sure you're already boyfriends," Roach said. "As far as Frenchie's concerned."

"Immature nonsense," Izzy said. "We fuck. I like him. I imagine he likes me, or he wouldn't be this upset."

Roach shrugged.

"Lovers?"

Izzy made a face like he'd tasted something sour.

"Partners?"

"I don't want another Blackbeard," Izzy said. "Not partners."

"Seems like boyfriends is the way to go," Roach said.

Izzy huffed, but started to get up from the table.

"Where are you going?" Roach asked.

“None of your fucking business,” Izzy said.



“Do you fucking sleep here?” Izzy asked as he clunked into the galley, looking for the means to make coffee.

“No,” Roach said, “but breakfast prep starts early. Coffee?”

He lifted a carafe and Izzy nodded.

“Real fucking early,” Izzy said.

“You’re up too,” Roach pointed out.

“Couldn’t sleep,” Izzy said. “I was waking Frenchie with my tossing and turning and thought I’d better get out of bed.”

“Sweet of you,” Roach said. “What’s up?”

“Same shit as always,” Izzy said, sitting heavily on the bench. “Nightmares.”

Roach hummed and nodded as he measured out some oats.

“Do you get nightmares?” Izzy asked. “I feel like we only ever talk about me.”

“Talk away, little man,” Roach said. “It *is* all about you.”

“What do you mean?” Izzy asked with some suspicion.

“It is something new I made up. I call it talk surgery. It helps with the mental wounds,” Roach said.

Izzy was silent.

“You think I have mental wounds?” he finally asked.

“Who among us does not?” Roach asked. “You’ve healed marvelously from your leg, and being shot — alhamdulillah it was the side with nothing important — and all that’s really left are the mental wounds.”

“Hm,” Izzy said. “You may be right, at that.”

"I usually am," Roach said. "So tell me about these nightmares."

Izzy fidgeted, feeling he was being put on the spot now that Roach had revealed the true nature of their conversation.

"The usual," he finally said. "Losing toes. Losing a leg. Fucking dying in Eddie's arms while I apologize for everything he's ever done wrong."

"Is that what you were doing?" Roach asked.

"More or less," Izzy said. "I didn't want me dying to fuck him up even worse."

"Mm," Roach said. "And you dream that you did die?"

"Yeah," Izzy said. "And the rest. Frenchie hates it. Makes him furious with Ed."

"I can see that," Roach said. "I am feeling a bit furious with Ed myself, now that you mention it."

"I deserved it," Izzy said with a sigh. "Don't forget that."

Roach's hands stilled.

"I do not think that is true," he said. "I think Ed needed someone to hurt because he was hurt. But it was never your fault."

"Eh," Izzy said, "a difference of opinion. I pushed him when Bonnet left."

"He was already losing it," Roach opined. "Seriously, that song? That was not the song of a mentally well man."

"You may be right," Izzy said. "But I did push."

Roach shrugged.

"No one can push that hard, old man. You didn't make the Kraken."

"Whether I made him or not, we dealt with him, in the end. He's not around anymore," Izzy said.

"He is clearly still around in your mind," Roach said. "And Frenchie's, and Jim's, and Archie's, and Fang's. Not to mention the rest of us."

Izzy huffed, scowling.

"Now he can cut Bonnet's toes off in that shack," he said. "Once the shine wears off."

"That he can," Roach agreed.

Izzy sat in silence, assimilating the conversation.

"Can I help with breakfast?" he asked.

"Absolutely, little man," Roach said. "You can chop walnuts."

Izzy took his aggression out on the nuts and Roach said nothing.

Someone clambered down the stairs. Definitely not Izzy, Roach thought. Even down a leg, he was more graceful than that. It was bound to be Frenchie. He popped his head out of the galley's service window and was proven right.

"Roach!" Frenchie said, clearly putting on a happier disposition than he was currently feeling. Roach thought he had been crying.

"Frenchie," Roach said. "Do you need some sweets or anything?"

The man loved his sweets, and Roach had gotten him through worse moods than this one with the liberal application of baked goods.

"No," Frenchie said, sitting heavily at the dining table. "I need advice."

"I have been known to give good advice," Roach said.

"It's about Izzy," Frenchie confessed, "and I thought, since you talk to him all the time…?"

"That is privileged," Roach said. "Medical in nature."

"Well, okay," Frenchie said, taken aback. "What if you give me advice because you're my friend?"

"That, I can do," Roach said. He gathered some cookies onto a plate and went out to sit next to Frenchie. "What is going on?"

“I proposed to Izzy,” Frenchie said.

It didn’t seem like congratulations were in order.

“Oh dear,” Roach said, shoving the plate of cookies toward Frenchie. “What were his reasons for saying no?”

“That I only want him because we’re trauma-bonded, that he’s too old for me, and that I’m too good for him,” Frenchie said as he munched forlornly on a cookie.

Roach huffed.

“I think we are all trauma-bonded,” he said. “Kind of a pirate thing.”

“These are great, babe. And, yeah,” Frenchie said with his mouth full, “but I wasn’t going to start a fight about it.”

Roach thought he might have gotten better results if he had.

“He hates letting himself be happy,” Roach observed. “It took some talking for us to reach the conclusion that he was in fact your boyfriend and he should not have been rude about it.”

“So I should send him down here for you to fix this?” Frenchie asked. “Please would you fix it?”

“I think you can fix it yourself,” Roach said, stopping Frenchie before he put the sixth cookie in his mouth and came to regret it. “Just listen to me and see if what I am saying makes sense.”

The person coming down the stairs was Izzy this time. He looked well-kissed.

“Roach!” he cried. “I have the best fuckin’ news.”

“Do you?” Roach asked innocently. He couldn’t help the smile on his face, but Izzy hardly noticed it.

“Yes,” Izzy said. “I’m getting married!”

“Congratulations!” Roach said, coming out of the galley and into the dining area again to grab Izzy’s hands and wave them around between the two of them. He’d have liked to pick Izzy up and swing him around, but wasn’t sure of the reception he’d receive.

“Frenchie talked me out of my objections,” he said. “I had a few.”

“I am not surprised,” Roach said. “I am also not surprised he talked you out of them.”

Izzy heaved a dreamy sigh.

“He’s perfect, Roach,” he said. “Just perfect.”

Roach waited for Izzy to say he wasn’t worthy of perfection, but he didn’t.

“I was going to try to talk it…out with him, after I told him no and realized I’d been an ass,” Izzy said, “but he beat me to it.”

“I am so proud of you both,” Roach said, tears in his eyes. Who could have predicted Izzy was going to *talk it through*?

“Couldn’t have done it without you,” Izzy grumbled, as though he thought it should pain him to say it.

“I know,” Roach said simply. “So what are we thinking for the cake?”



Art by Patrike

Izzy's Revenge

Written by LaceratedLullabies

Rating: T

Beta credit: hotcryptidsummer

Summary:

Scenes in Izzy's second tenure as Captain Hands. A collection of post-S2 drabbles.

Standing at the bow of the ship, Izzy looked over the newly refurbished figurehead. The unicorn's newly carved head was raised proudly to the sky, her three legs perfectly posed. To the side of one cheek was a carefully chiselled X, an embellishment Izzy hadn't approved and *definitely* hadn't teared up over discovering.

He allowed himself one glance over his shoulder as he watched the island fade away. One glance, before he shifted his gaze to the figurehead and the horizon ahead of her. One glance, before Izzy turned his back on Edward's new life and looked towards his own.

A shock ran through him every time they called him ‘Captain’. It wasn’t the first time he’d held this title, but it may be the first that he’d earned it. The man he’d been back then hadn’t been fit to lead them, regardless of what he might have thought.

Captaincy wasn’t something he was owed, a chance to claim the power and control he had fought all his life for a scrap of. It was a service in and of itself, a duty to himself and his crew. It was an honour, and one Izzy was determined to keep earning.

Storytime was reinstated at Archie’s insistence. Despite, or maybe because of, the fact she’d never experienced Bonnet’s storytelling, she had formed an attachment to the concept.

Izzy understood where she was coming from. The combination of escapism and companionship drew in those who had lived too long with neither. That was likely why everyone was eager to bring back the tradition once she raised the idea.

Unlike last time, the crew didn’t let Izzy stand apart. He’d taken his old, familiar position, slightly aside, slightly away, but eager hands and warm voices quickly pulled him in before Jim’s tale began.

The thing about Calypso was that she wasn’t bound by time the same way mere mortals were. At least, that was Frenchie’s excuse when he came to Izzy with plans for the Revenge’s next big bash. Izzy had put up a fight that his first mate knew was bullshit, and that fight had only lasted until Frenchie shushed him with a demand to pick a song. “In advance this time, mate, so I can practise your backing music,” he’d insisted, and Izzy may be the captain nowadays, but what could he do in the face of such orders but obey?

Wee John's hands were as gentle against his cheek as the brush that swept over his skin. Maybe Izzy could have handled his own 'look' this time, but that wasn't the point. More than the look itself, he wanted to be made over.

In return, John had let Izzy do his lipstick, guiding his trembling hand as he traced rouge over his lips. Dark red lips, quirked in a wicked grin that Izzy couldn't look away from for a while.

This time, instead of the repainted X tattoo, Izzy stepped on stage with a red kiss pressed against his cheek.

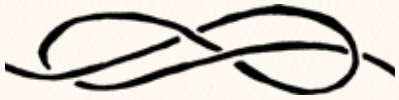
Izzy was looking out at the island when, in a flurry of feathers, Buttons materialised by his side. The crew had soon adjusted to his return, their cries of witchery pushed aside to make way for joy at their friend's return.

"Should be making port in ten minutes, Captain."

Captain. Would that word ever stop striking him? They would soon reunite with two men Izzy had once called Captain. When they met this time, for the first time, it would be on even footing. Izzy couldn't quite imagine it, but he looked forward to seeing what it would look like.

Izzy's Revenge

Written by LaceratedLullabies



Translated into Spanish by Jackeline Harkness

Título: La Venganza de Izzy

Clasificación: T

Sinopsis: Escenas en el segundo mandato de Izzy como Capitán Hands. Una colección de drabbles post-S2.

A e pie en la proa del barco, Izzy miró el recién renovado figurón decorativo. La nueva cabeza tallada del unicornio se alzaba orgullosa hacia el cielo, sus tres patas perfectamente posadas. En el lado de una mejilla había una X cuidadosamente cincelada, un adorno que Izzy no había aprobado y que definitivamente no le había llenado los ojos de lágrimas al descubrirlo.

De permitió una mirada sobre el hombro, observando la isla desvanecerse en la lejanía. Una mirada, antes de retornar su vista al figurón y el horizonte al frente. Una mirada, antes de que Izzy le diera la espalda a la nueva vida de Edward y mirara hacia la suya propia.

Un shock le recorría cada vez que le llamaban 'Capitán'. No era la primera vez que ostentaba este título, pero era muy posiblemente la primera vez que lo había ganado. El hombre que había sido en aquel entonces no había sido el apropiado para liderarlos, independientemente de lo que él hubiese pensado.

La Capitanía no era algo que le fuese debido, una oportunidad de reclamar el poder y el control de los cuales había luchado toda su vida por tener al menos unas migajas. Era un servicio por sí mismo, un deber a sí mismo y a su tripulación. Era un honor, y uno que Izzy estaba determinado a seguir ganándose.

A insistencia de Archie, la hora de contar historias se había reinstaurado. A pesar de, o tal vez a causa del hecho de que nunca había experimentado las narraciones de Bonnet, había desarrollado un apego a la idea.

Izzy comprendía el motivo. La combinación de escapismo y de compañía era muy atrayente para quienes habían vivido demasiado tiempo sin ellos. Quizá era por eso que todos estaban ansiosos por retomar la tradición una vez que ella había propuesto la idea.

A diferencia de la vez anterior, la tripulación no le permitió a Izzy mantenerse apartado. Había tomado su antigua y familiar posición, ligeramente a un lado, ligeramente alejado, pero manos llenas de entusiasmo y voces cálidas rápidamente lo habían acercado antes de que Jim iniciara su historia.

El tema con Calypso era que ella no experimentaba el tiempo de la misma forma que los simples mortales. Al menos, esa fue la excusa de Frenchie cuando se acercó a Izzy con planes para la siguiente fiesta en el Revenge. Izzy había opuesto una resistencia que su primer oficial sabía falsa, y esa resistencia solo había durado hasta que Frenchie lo había acallado con sus demandas de que eligiera una canción. "Esta vez por adelantado, amigo, para tener oportunidad de practicar el acompañamiento musical," había insistido, y tal vez Izzy era el capitán ahora, pero, ¿qué se podía hacer ante tales órdenes, sino obedecer?

Las manos de Wee John eran tan gentiles contra su mejilla como la suave brocha que corría por su piel. Quizá Izzy podía haberse encargado de su propio 'look' esta vez, pero ese no era el punto. Más que el look en sí mismo, le interesaba la reinvención.

A cambio, John había permitido que Izzy se encargara de su labial, guiando su mano temblorosa mientras aplicaba el carmín sobre sus labios. Labios de un rojo oscuro, curvados en una traviesa sonrisa de la cual Izzy no pudo arrancar sus ojos por un rato.

Esta vez, en lugar de repintar su tatuaje en forma de X, Izzy entró en el escenario con un beso rojo pintado en su mejilla.

Izzy miraba hacia la isla cuando, en un batir de plumas, Buttons se materializó a su lado. La tripulación se había acostumbrado rápidamente a su retorno, sus gritos acerca de brujería olvidados para dar paso a pura alegría ante el regreso de su amigo.

"Debería estar llegando a puerto en diez minutos, Capitán."

Capitán. ¿Alguna vez la palabra dejaría de golpearle? Pronto se reunirían con dos hombres que Izzy alguna vez había llamado Capitán. Cuando se encontraran esta vez, por primera ocasión, lo harían en igualdad de condiciones. Izzy no podía imaginarlo del todo, pero esperaba con impaciencia saber cómo sería.

All is well, all is accepted

Written by Buoymehome

Rating: T

Beta credit: MoonyGolightly

Summary:

(...) he thinks he is going straight for the gravy basket. "Oh no, Israel, you are right in it." - set straight after the end of S2.

The fog drifts, quiet and wet, around The Revenge. It slides between the wooden slats, swirls around nails, and hangs on the ropes. It feels like a jungle of creaking planks, with dangling vines of mist swinging in the wind.

The crew is around him. Izzy senses them, running and talking and going about their daily tasks.

There is perception more than vision, coloured shapes in which he recognises the human he knows should be there.

Everything is muffled and so *fucking* wet. So damp. He feels it in his bones, even in his unicorn leg, as if in this moment it is part of his very being. Izzy feels solid, on the deck, in the galley, in his quarters. He is solid and so is the ship.

He sleeps, maybe. He lies on the bed and watches the ceiling. Maybe there is sleep. He is unsure. How long does he stay there, how long does he stand on-deck, how long does he roam the various areas of the ship, following the mist and the smells of his childhood lodgings.

He is alone. Alone with mist and shapes and his own slippery mind that slowly, surely, unravels until he feels like he is not just on the ship but he *is* the ship.

He feels everything. The shapes of the crew walk along his deck, and he feels everything. Coloured mist climbs the rigging and he feels *fucking* everything.

He feels the wind in his flags. The creaking of the planks over and under him. The sway of the rigging and the smell of the spray hitting the sails. He feels the grain of wood on the bannisters and the coldness of the cannons. There he smells powder and the heated air of battle. He feels the barnacles on the keel and freedom in the waves. Suddenly, he remembers feeling how he once was, at the beginning of Blackbeard.

His swirling thoughts hold still for an instant as his heart starts beating again.

Later, later, he stands guard at the wheel, looking over a working crew of fog. He can make out the crew now and it's lacking an Ed, it's lacking fucking Bonnet. There are also additions he doesn't recognise. He looks at the ghostly shadows; they work well together.

And no matter how much he tries, there is the room he can't access, the door welded to the frame, mist drifting from the cracks. It tastes like decay and liquorice. It is not in the ship's memory. It grates at him. He is missing something.

He stands against the mizen mast and feels damp and wet and it comes from his eyes, as the water drips down the staircase, onto the deck. The vines of mist on the rigging are now swirling down the mast, covering him in a sheen of cold salty water and around him, puddles everywhere, the tendrils of mist extending there, as if seeking moisture to grow, expand, maybe take over.



Art by Sweven

The sun rises and mini rainbows appear, the puddles glitter like wavering diamonds, sparkling like spring. He feels, deep inside, joy. It tastes of orange marmalade and boiled candies.

The water slowly joins the ocean again. The fog remains. And the Revenge continues on her course. She is bound East, for the African coast, he knows that by a turn of the ship, by the set of the sails, by the wind in his hair. Change is upon them. Upon him.

They cross the Equator and Izzy wonders why they run. It makes him pause and think. He should know something. Something is missing. The mist around the welded door smells of decay and licorice. And the decks are slippery again as moisture escapes his eyes while shapes run past him.

And it goes on. Time still stands while rushing through him. He glimpses himself now, it's a new thing, he sees himself as he passes the small mirror in his quarter and jumps at the sight.

Ghastly. Ghostly. Wet and damp. But solid, so solid he cries again. Who is he, who was he. What the ever loving fuck is happening?

And the smell of decay remains, but coffee is now mixing with the licorice. Still, the door remains, and so does the mystery of the locked room.

They celebrate on deck, and he joins the carnival of shapes. He smells the rum and the sweetness of the grog being passed around. The mist carries it around for days after that and he stands at the head of the ship, alone, away from the shapes and their distorted sounds.

"Ah, here you are." The voice is so clear he thinks he is going straight for the gravy basket. "Oh no, Israel, you are right in it."

It looks, and sounds, like his *aintin*, a waif of a woman who was always reading the tea leaves at the bottom of his cups. He stays silent. Yet she can read his mind as she follows through with a smile and a tap on his shoulder, just like she did after having delivered whatever message the leaves had been telling her.

"I was looking for you on land, but *of course*, you are on the ship."

“I am the ship.” His voice is rough, not having been used for days, months maybe, and brings a tenor from the depth he never had before. His *aintin* smiles and turns around. He follows.

“You can be. You’ve always been a multitude. Still are.”

They are down in the belly of the ship now. He wants to ask about why he is here, why she is here. Still she goes and he follows, in silence.

The impossible room with its impossible door looms. The mist has a taste of chocolate behind the licorice and coffee. A hint of cinnamon. There’s a handle on the door. The welding is gone.

“You’re a multitude, have always been.” She is gone as silently has she appeared, and he steps into the mist.

Safe Harbor

Written by lustig

Rating: T

Beta credit: Kat

Summary:

The Kraken kicked Izzy off the Revenge during a storm. Izzy washes up in Tortuga and tries to drown his sorrows in alcohol – thinking that his life is over, until someone unexpected quite literally runs into him…

If Nassau was the touristy, gentrified center of piracy, Tortuga was her dark mirror. Gritty and gross, the smell of refuse was pungent and inescapable; the people washing up on Tortuga's shores generally would have preferred getting swallowed by the sea to ending up in the dirty pirate hole.

Deals with the devil were made here, they said. Shrines to gods you might not want your wishes answered by could be found on every other corner.

It was a place that only the most foolish, the most desperate – or the most unlucky – would ever find themselves.

Thus, it was to no one's surprise that it was Tortuga where Izzy washed up, unceremoniously shoved off the *Revenge* by the Kraken during the last storm Blackbeard refused to avoid sailing into.

Some might say that he should be happy just to have made it to land alive. Wet and sore, carrying within himself a broken spirit and broken heart, Izzy did not feel happy, or lucky, or any other soft, pansy feeling one could come up with under the scorching Caribbean sun.

He only felt miserable.

His name still carried some weight – despite Blackbeard giving up the *Queen Anne*, despite the rampage the Kraken had gone on, and despite the intrusions on other pirate captains' territories. Especially here, in this cesspool of human outcasts. His clout was enough to find a place to sleep that was not soaked through with muck. Enough to earn some coins by selling his knowledge to the rare fortune seeker passing by.

It kept him fed.

But, more importantly – it kept him *drunk*.

Drunk enough to stop caring about the unceremonious end of his career. Drunk enough, even, to stop caring about the blatant rejection of his love for one Edward fucking Teach.

People kept a wide berth around him, unless they were intentionally braving his ire to sate their curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

He preferred it like that.

Human contact was overrated anyway.

That is, until the evening Izzy ran into *him*.

The night starts out like any other since Izzy arrived in Tortuga. The sun sets and the streets begin to wake up. Music, then laughter and singing hesitantly come to life, growing more uproarious as the hour grows later.

Izzy is nursing a drink – he has lost count on how many he has had now –

when a man stumbles into his back, nearly tipping the chair that has become Izzy's in silent agreement.

"Watch your *fucking* step," Izzy slurs as he turns, glaring at the stranger. Tall, he is. Taller even than Blackbeard, with eyes green like the sea in a storm. He wears the uniform of a naval officer, dirty enough that discerning the rank is near impossible. An unkempt wig hides dark brown hair, greasy from neglect. The hat he wears might be the only thing keeping it in place.

"Or *what*?" the stranger snipes back. His eyes flash with the same hunger for blood, the same itch for violence that also burns under Izzy's skin. He has a nice voice, a distant part of Izzy notes, as rage narrows his awareness to the stranger. The other man straightens to his full height as Izzy gets up. The chair topples over behind him, instantly forgotten as Izzy's hand closes around the handle of his sword.

There is a moment of stillness, as if the world itself is holding its breath. Then two swords slide out of their sheaths simultaneously and clash together in a flurry of strikes and parries, attacks and feints too quick even for the sober eye to follow.

Izzy is drunk, and the barely healed scar tissue of his missing toe smarts with every step he takes. He is not at his best – far from it, really – and rage, as quick as it makes him, also makes him sloppy.

But even at his rock bottom, Izzy is still better than most pirates are at their best.

The stranger, however, turns out to be a much more formidable opponent than Izzy could have ever anticipated, even from a (former) Navy officer. He works up a sweat, every step in their dance sobering him up a little more – until his raging need to teach the stranger a lesson has changed to grudging respect, then genuine appreciation for the other man's clear skill with the blade.

No one interrupts their battle. People move out of their way, watching enraptured as their fight picks up finesse as it loses its initial brutal anger.

Izzy does not care about the bets exchanging hands. He does not even care that more and more people are gathering against the walls of the pub, word of their fight obviously spreading fast.

The stranger's strikes gain in confidence and sureness as he sobers, too – and Izzy can see a similar kind of respect to the one he feels himself growing in the stranger's eyes.

They continue fighting until Izzy feels his arms grow sore. Another strike; Izzy smacks the stranger's sword to the side, and the stranger lets him. Izzy does not bring his sword up again, tip pointing harmlessly to the dusty floor. They stare at each other, chests heaving in exertion, smiles playing around their lips. No one dares say a word, though the whole pub must be itching for *something*, now.

"You're not half-bad," Izzy eventually says, in between gulping breaths.

"Thanks," the stranger answers. His smile grows a little softer, a little more earnest. "Let me buy you a drink?"

Izzy nods and puts his sword away, before offering the stranger a hand in greeting: "Izzy Hands."

Warm hands clasp around his, rough with callouses of a life spent at sea.

"James Norrington."

The storms that brought Izzy and James to Tortuga had been different ones – and ones borne as much from inner turmoil as from churning seas.

Like ships in a gale, they had been adrift; toys to the forces at work around them. But in each other, they found a safe haven.

When they set out again, it will be with each other. And the storms are going to be left behind.

Safe Harbor

Written by lustig



Translated into Polish by ewelinakl

Tytuł: Bezpieczna przystań

Klasyfikacja: T

Beta-czytelnik: Nadzieja

Streszczenie:

Kraken wyrzucił Izzy'ego z Revenge podczas sztormu. Izzy ląduje na Tortudze i próbuje utopić smutki w alkoholu, myśląc, że to koniec jego żywota — aż ktoś niespodziewany dosłownie na niego wpada.

Jeśli Nassau było turystycznym, zgentryfikowanym centrum piractwa, Tortuga była jego odbiciem w krzywym zwierciadle. Przyziemna i obrzydliwa, przesiąknięta smrodem odpadów; ci, którzy lądowali na jej brzegach zazwyczaj woleliby zostać połknięci przez morze niż skończyć w tej dziurze pełnej piratów.

Tutaj zawierało się pakty z diabłem, jak głosiły legendy. Na każdym kroku można było spotkać ołtarze dla bogów, od których nie chciałoby się uzyskać pomocy w realizacji swoich marzeń.

Tortuga była miejscem, gdzie kończyli tylko najwięksi głupcy i desperaci — albo najwięksi pechowcy.

Więc nie powinno to być zaskoczeniem, że to właśnie na Tortudze wylądował

Izzy, po tym jak Kraken bezceremonialnie wypchnął go z *Revenge* podczas ostatniego sztormu, w który Blackbeard zdecydował się wpłynąć.

Można by pomyśleć, że Izzy powinien być zadowolony — w końcu dotarł do brzegu żywy. Przemoczony i obolały, ze złamanym sercem i duchem, Izzy nie czuł się jednak zadowolony, szczęśliwy czy jakiekolwiek inne pozytywne, rozmemłane określenia mogłyby komuś przyjść na myśl pod upalnym Karaibskim słońcem.

Izzy czuł się żałośnie.

Jego imię wciąż coś jednak znaczyło — pomimo tego, że Blackbeard porzucił *Queen Anne*, pomimo zniszczenia jakie siał Kraken, pomimo ich intruzji na terytoria innych piratów. Szczególnie w tym szambie pełnym wyrzutków, sława Izzy'ego wystarczała, by zapewnić mu miejsce do spania, które nie byłoby pełne błota. Wystarczała, żeby mógł zarobić trochę grosza, sprzedając informacje nielicznym poszukiwaczom szczęścia i fortuny.

Wystarczała, żeby nie był głodny.

I przede wszystkim — żeby był *pijany*.

Dostatecznie pijany, żeby nie przejmować się bezceremonialnym końcem swojej kariery. Dostatecznie pijany, żeby nie przejmować się tym, jak obcesowo Edward Teach odtrącił jego uczucia.

Ludzie omijali go z daleka, chyba że byli gotowi zmierzyć się z jego wściekłością po to, by zaspokoić ciekawość i głód wiedzy.

Izzy'emu to odpowiadało.

Kontakt międzyludzki tak czy siak był mocno przereklamowany.

Tak było do czasu aż wpadł na *niego*.

Noc zaczyna się jak każda inna, odkąd Izzy zjawił się na Tortudze. Słońce zachodzi i ulice zaczynają się budzić. Muzyka, potem śmiech i śpiew powoli budzą się do życia, tym głośniejsze, im późniejsza godzina.

Izzy powoli sączy drinka — stracił już rachubę, który to z kolei — kiedy jakiś facet wpada na niego, niemal przewracając krzesło, które na mocy niemego porozumienia stało się *jego* krzesłem.

– Patrz, kurwa, jak leziesz – bełkocze Izzy, piorunując obcego wzrokiem.

Mężczyzna jest wysoki, wyższy niż Blackbeard, jego oczy zielone jak morze podczas burzy. Ma na sobie uniform oficera marynarki, na tyle brudny, że nie da się określić jego stopnia. Potargana peruka zakrywa brązowe włosy, tłuste i zaniedbane. Jego kapelusz jest chyba jedynym powodem, dla którego to wszystko trzyma się jeszcze na jego głowie.

– *Bo co*? – odpowiada nieznajomy. Jego oczy migoczą tym samym pragnieniem krwi i przemocy, które tli się pod skórą Izzy'ego. Facet ma przyjemny głos, Izzy zauważa jakby przez mgłę, podczas gdy wściekłość koncentruje jego uwagę na obcym.

Izzy wstaje, zaciskając dłoń wokół rękojeści miecza. Krzesło przewraca się za nim, natychmiast zapomniane. Nieznajomy prostuje się w odpowiedzi.

Przez moment, wszystko staje w bezruchu, jakby świat wstrzymał oddech. Dwa miecze wysuwają się z pochew w tej samej chwili i ścierają się w lawinie pchnięć i parad, ataków i uników zbyt szybkich do śledzenia, nawet trzeźwym okiem.

Izzy jest pijany. Ledwie zabliźniona rana przy brakującym palcu u nogi pali przy każdym kroku, który stawia. Nie jest u szczytu formy — bardzo daleko od niego, szczerze powiedziawszy — a wściekłość, chociaż dodaje mu prędkości, sprawia, że jego ruchy są niezgrabne.

Ale nawet po sięgnięciu dna, Izzy jest lepszym szermierzem niż większość piratów w swojej najlepszej formie.

Obcy jednak okazuje się być o wiele bardziej wymagającym przeciwnikiem niż Izzy mógł oczekiwać, nawet po (byłym) oficerze marynarki. Izzy jest spocony, coraz bardziej trzeźwy z każdym krokiem w tym tańcu — aż jego wściekła potrzeba dania obcemu lekcji zamienia się w niechętny respekt i wreszcie szczery podziw dla jego umiejętności szermierczych.

Nikt nie przerywa ich walki. Ludzie schodzą im z drogi, obserwując ocza-

rowani jak ich pojedynek nabiera finezji, tracąc jednocześnie pierwotną brutalność i złość.

Izzy nie przejmuje się zakładami stawianymi przez zebraną publiczność. Nie zwraca uwagi na to, że coraz więcej ludzi gromadzi się pod ścianami pubu. Opowieści o ich pojedynku najwyraźniej rozprzestrzeniają się błyskawicznie.

Ciosy obcego nabierają pewności i celności, w miarę jak on też trzeźwieje — Izzy widzi w jego oczach ten sam rodzaj szacunku, jaki wzbiera w nim.

Kontynuują tę walkę aż ramiona Izzy'ego zaczynają boleć. Kolejne pchnięcie; Izzy odpycha miecz obcego w bok, bez większego oporu ze strony przeciwnika. Izzy nie podnosi miecza ponownie, koniec ostrza skierowany w stronę zakurzonej podłogi. Patrzą na siebie, żebra unoszą się w ciężkim oddechu, uśmiechy pojawiają się na ich ustach. Nikt nie śmie się odezwać, chociaż cały pub oczekuje w napięciu na *jakąkolwiek* reakcję.

– Nie jesteś taki znowu najgorszy – odzywa się w końcu Izzy, łykając powietrze pomiędzy słowami.

– Dzięki – odpowiada obcy. Jego uśmiech staje się odrobinę bardziej miękki, trochę bardziej szczery. – Mogę postawić ci drinka?

Izzy kiwa głową i chowa miecz, zanim podaje obcemu rękę. – Izzy Hands.

Ciepła dłoń ściska jego własną, szorstką i stwardniałą od życia na morzu.

– James Norrington.

Zupełnie inne burze sprowadziły Izzy'ego i Jamesa na Tortugę — wywołane w równej mierze przez wewnętrzny chaos jak wzburzone morza.

Dryfowali bez celu jak statki podczas wichury; zabawki w rękach sił wyższych, ostatecznie znajdując bezpieczną przystań w sobie nawzajem.

Gdy postawią żagle po raz kolejny, zrobią to razem. A wszystkie burze zostaną daleko za nimi.

two ships in a gale (and a bit of a flirt)

Written by Sweven

Rating: T

Beta credit: ewelinakl

Summary:

Written for the Prompt War!

Archie and Jim make out in a storm. And well, if they flirt a bit with Izzy while doing so, all the more fun.

The deck creaks dangerously under Archie's feet. "Hells," she mutters, and stoops down to pick up a loose bucket. "Are we sure that he's not lost it again?" she yells across the deck, where Frenchie is clinging to the railing.

Frenchie shrugs half-heartedly, and *that's* not very reassuring. "It's just a bit of a gale, innit? We've weathered worse!"

Jim appears, stretching their hand towards Archie. "Let's get below deck!" Jim's eyes are alight with a sparkle, a glimmer of excitement at the storm, and Archie feels it answered within herself, the fear of the endless depths of the ocean mingling with the glee of feeling *alive*.

Archie hesitates for a moment, looking at the loose bits of equipment she'd been tasked with clearing up, and then she shrugs. The sea will wash it away if

the waves get strong enough, and if not, it'll be there for her to clean up afterwards, won't it? Archie's never been one to deny herself the easy pleasures in life, and hell, this might be her last chance to push her partner up against a bulkhead and kiss the breath from their lungs.

The ship tilts again, crashing against the break of the waves, and Archie loses her balance, falling and sliding across the deck, but she grabs hold of Jim's hand at the last moment.

Jim tugs Archie closer, into their embrace as they still hold onto the railing, a safe harbour in the chaos. Their skin is cold and clammy, but Archie presses up against them nonetheless, smiling as she leans in for a kiss. "My hero," she says before their lips crash against one another. Jim's arm is strong and steady, and Archie almost forgets where she is, if not for the sound of Frenchie's grunting across the deck.

"Really? Here?" he asks loudly. Archie ignores him, deepening the kiss instead.

When a splash of ocean-water makes it onto the deck, drenching them, they break apart, dissolving into a breathless laugh made from elation and glee and sheer adrenaline.

Their laughter is echoed from the wheel where Blackbeard is standing, braced against the wind. His hair is whipping around his face, and there's a maniacal twist to his expression that reminds Archie of when he'd worn dark kohl around his eyes.

That was months ago, though, and he's not threatened Archie into battering anyone to death since, so the ring of laughter through the air only sends *some* measure of dread down her spine.

She clings to Jim as another wave rocks the ship, and at the wheel, she sees Stede doing the same, his arms tightly encircled around Blackbeard's waist. "Ed!" he shouts. "There are cliffs! And-and another ship!"

"I see them, I see them!" Blackbeard answers, and turns the wheel sharply to the aft. "I wonder what these poor buggers are doing out here in this weather!"

"*We're* out here in this weather!" Stede's voice is shrill.

"Ah, don't worry so much, Stede!" he shouts, and turns the wheel even more.

Frenchie loses his grip on the railing when the ship shifts its lean, and Archie hears him cursing as he slides into a staircase.

"You good?" she yells.

Frenchie grabs hold of something sturdy and pulls himself to his feet. "I'm fine, I'm fine!" he yells as he disappears below deck.

Archie grimaces. "D'you think we can manage—"

Shaking their head, Jim tugs her closer. "I reckon we'll just drown, don't you?"

Another shriek sounds from the wheel, and the captain's voice drowns in the sound of the waves for a moment before Archie can pick up his words again. "Ed, I think I'm going to be sick."

"Go join Izzy, then, I bet he's hanging over a railing somewhere with the rest of the crew!" Blackbeard's booming laughter is infectious, and Archie feels something bubbling in her chest. The sea-spray is making hair stick to her face, her neck, and her leathers are heavy, drenched through and they'll be a nightmare to clean tomorrow, but she laughs alongside the madman at the wheel.

"Edward, I'm right here," Izzy barks out, clawing his way out from behind the mast. He's closer to Archie and Jim than to the wheel, and his voice strains at the effort to make his voice carry across the deck. "It's the *Ranger*, Ed, it's *Jack*!"

Archie feels Jim stiffen against her, and they let out a string of curses in Spanish. "Who's Jack?" Archie asks, and Jim sneers.

"A fucking asshole, that's who he is."

Izzy's answering snort is cut short by a wave splashing over him. It gives him the distinct appearance of a wet cat.

"Jimenez is right, he is an asshole," he spits out, slicking his hair back into place. "And he's supposed to be *dead*."

"Izzy!" Blackbeard shouts. "What the hell is *Jack* doing here?!"

"How the hell am I supposed to know?!" Izzy shouts back, the set of his brow irate and annoyed.

It took Archie some getting used to, listening to the two of them bickering like this without the threat of someone's leg being shot off.

Izzy's unsteady on the deck, but he makes his way towards them. Archie sees the way he does a double take when he realises how closely entwined they are. Then he straightens his back, a mask sliding into place, covering the glimmer of interest there. "Jimenez! Archie! What are you lot just hanging around for?! Make yourselves busy!"

With a grin, Jim tugs Archie closer, their leg between Archie's, and oh, Archie knows this game. "We are busy, old man!" Jim answers, and Archie smirks, burying her face in Jim's neck. She stretches upwards and licks a stripe up Jim's throat, tasting salt and sweat, the adrenaline spreading as arousal through her body.

She feels alive.

Izzy shoots them a deadpan stare. "In the middle of a gale, really? You're as bad as Ed."

"Come on, *hombrecito*, are you jealous?" Jim quips. "We've told you, we've got space for one more in our room, I'm sure Olu won't mind."

For a moment Izzy pauses, a peculiar look spreading across his face, but then a wave crashes into the ship and sends them all reeling.

"We're in the clear!" Blackbeard shouts, and Archie lets out a huff of disbelief.

"What, no we're not?" she says, probably only loudly enough that Jim can hear her. "We're still in—"

Suddenly, the ship is still again, swaying slightly on the waves. The deck is wet and Izzy pulls himself to his feet, shooting Archie a flat look. "You were saying?"

Archie looks at the sky. Above them, it's still dark and stormy, but a beam of

sunlight breaks through and bathes the Revenge in glorious yellows. “What the hell,” she mutters.

Blackbeard comes bouncing down the steps, a queasy-looking Stede in tow. “C’mon, Izzy, let’s go see what Jack’s up to!” he says excitedly, and Izzy groans.

“Do we have to?”

“Yep!”

Izzy trails off after Ed and Stede, casting a brief glance towards Jim and Archie. Archie thinks she sees a smile hidden there, but he turns his back on them too soon for her to be sure.

The *Ranger* exits the gale as well, and Archie hears a distant whooping sound. She can almost make out a small, excited figure on the bow. Blackbeard hollers in return, and the dinghy is lowered much too fast to be safe.

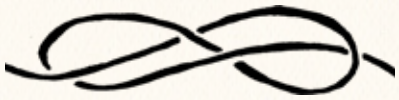
As the figure on the bow shouts again, Jim spits out another curse. “Fuck that. Let’s go find Olu,” they say, and Archie shrugs.

“D’you think Izzy will join us one day?” she asks excitedly as they descend the staircase,and Jim’s frown turns into a laugh, light and pealing.

“Your guess is as good as mine, *cariño*,” they say, and grasp Archie’s hand in theirs.

two ships in a gale (and a bit of a flirt)

Written by Sweven



Translated into Polish by ewelinakl

Tytuł: dwa statki podczas wichury (i trochę flirtu)

Klasyfikacja: T

Beta-czytelnik: Nadzieja

Streszczenie:

Napisane podczas Prompt War.

Archie i Jim całują się podczas burzy. I, cóż, może flirtują przy tym trochę z Izzym, ot tak, dla zabawy.

Pokład trzeszczy niebezpiecznie pod jej stopami.

– Cholera – mamrocze Archie, schylając się, żeby podnieść wiadro. – Jesteśmy pewni, że mu znowu nie odbiło? – krzyczy do Frenchiego, kurczowo trzymającego się relingu po drugiej stronie pokładu.

Frenchie wzrusza ramionami bez większego przekonania, co *wcale* jej nie uspokaja.

– To tylko lekka wichura, no nie? Gorsze rzeczy przeżyliśmy!

Pojawia się Jim, wyciągając rękę w stronę Archie. – Spadamy pod pokład!

Oczy Jima płoną podekscytowaniem nadciągającym sztormem, które znajduje odzwierciedlenie w uczuciach Archie, lęk przed nieprzebytą tonią oceanu mieszający się z czystą radością z tego, że *żyje*.

Archie waha się przez chwilę, patrząc na ekwipunek leżący luzem na pokładzie, rzeczy, które miała sprzątnąć, po czym wzrusza ramionami. Morze i tak zmyje to wszystko, jeśli fale będą dostatecznie silne. A jak nie, to zawsze można posprzątać po burzy, no nie? Archie nie jest osobą odmawiającą sobie drobnych przyjemności w życiu, a to może być jej ostatnia szansa, żeby przyprzeć jej partnera do grodzi kadłuba i całować do utraty tchu.

Statek przechyla się ponownie, ścierając się z falami. Archie traci równowagę, upadając i ślizgając się po pokładzie, chwytając Jima za rękę w ostatniej chwili.

Jim przyciąga ją bliżej siebie, obejmuje, wciąż trzymając się mocno relingu, jej bezpieczna przystań w tym całym tym rozgardiaszu. Skóra Jima jest zimna i lepka, ale Archie i tak uśmiecha się, przysuwając się bliżej, przechylając głowę do pocałunku.

– Mój bohater – mówi zanim ich usta zderzają się ze sobą. Ramię Jima jest silne i stabilne, i Archie mogłaby zapomnieć gdzie jest, gdyby nie chrząknięcie Frenchiego dobiegające ją z drugiej strony pokładu.

– Serio? Tutaj? – Frenchie pyta głośno. Archie ignoruje go, pogłębiając pocałunek.

Kiedy bryzg morskiej wody uderza w pokład, mocząc ich do suchej nitki, odsuwają się od siebie ze śmiechem. Euforia, radość i czysta adrenalina zapierają im dech.

Blackbeard odpowiada śmiechem na ich śmiech ze swojego miejsca przy sterze, gdzie zmaga się z nawałnicą. Włosy chłoszczą wokół jego twarzy wykrzywionej w szaleńczym grymasie, który przypomina Archie o czasie, kiedy oczy Blackbearda były uczernione węglem.

Ale to było całe miesiące temu. Od tamtego momentu, Blackbeard nie próbował zastraszyć Archie, zmusić jej do zatłuczenia nikogo na śmierć, więc tylko *trochę* lęku spływa jej po kręgosłupie na dźwięk jego śmiechu unoszącego się w powietrzu.

Archie trzyma się kurczowo Jima podczas gdy kolejna fala miota ich statkiem. Przy sterze, Stede robi to samo, jego ramiona owinięte ciasno wokół talii Blackbearda.

– Ed! – krzyczy Stede. – Tam są klify! I—i jakiś statek!

– Widzę, widzę! – odpowiada Blackbeard, obracając ster gwałtownie w stronę rufy. – Ciekawe co ci biedacy tam robią w taką pogodę!

– Co *my* tu robimy w taką pogodę! – Głos Stede'a jest przenikliwy.

– Nie zamartwiaj się tak, Stede! – krzyczy Blackbeard, obracając ster jeszcze bardziej.

Statek przechyla się i ręka Frenchiego ześlizguje się z relingu. Archie słyszy stek przekleństw, podczas gdy Frenchie zsuwa się do klatki schodowej.

– Wszystko w porządku? – krzyczy Archie.

Frenchie łapie za coś solidnego i zbiera się z podłogi. – Wszystko okej! – krzyczy, znikając pod pokładem.

Archie krzywi się. – Myślisz, że dałoby radę...

Jim potrząsa głową, przyciągając ją bliżej. – Zdaje mi się, że byśmy utonęli, nie uważasz?

Kolejny wrzask w okolicy steru. Głos ich kapitana tonie na moment w huku fal zanim Archie zaczyna znowu rozróżniać słowa.

– Ed, ja chyba zwymiotuję.

– To idź posiedź z Izzym, założę się, że wisi gdzieś na relingu z resztą załogi! – Gromki śmiech Blackbearda jest zaraźliwy i Archie czuje jak coś kipi jej w piersi. Bryzgi morskiej wody przyklejają jej włosy do twarzy i szyi, jej skórzane ubrania są ciężkie, przemoczone do suchej nitki, czyszczenie ich jutro będzie drogą przez mękę, ale mimo to, Archie śmieje się razem z tym

wariatem u steru.

– Edward, tutaj jestem – warczy Izzy, wyłaniając się zza masztu, którego jest uczepiony. Jest mu bliżej do Archie i Jima niż do steru i musi wytężyć głos, żeby dało się go usłyszeć po drugiej stronie pokładu. – To *Ranger*, Ed! To Jack!

Archie czuje jak Jim sztywnieje obok niej, mamrocząc przekleństwa po hiszpańsku. – Kto to jest Jack? – pyta Archie.

Jim uśmiecha się pogardliwie. – Skończony dupek, oto kto.

Prychnięcie Izzy'ego jest ucięte przez falę, która w niego uderza, nadając mu wyglądu mokrego kota.

– Jimenez ma rację, Jack *jest* dupkiem – prycha Izzy, próbując ułożyć włosy. – A do tego powinien *nie żyć*.

– Izzy! – krzyczy Blackbeard. – Co, do diabła, robi tutaj *Jack*?!

– A skąd niby mam wiedzieć?! – odwrzaskuje Izzy, linia jego brwi zdradza poirytowanie.

Archie potrzebowała trochę czasu, żeby przyzwyczaić się do słuchania sprzeczek tej dwójki bez obawy, że ktoś odstrzeli komuś nogę.

Izzy zbliża się do nich niepewnym krokiem. Archie widzi moment zaskoczenia, kiedy Izzy zauważa jak mocno ona i Jim są z sobą spleceni. Po chwili, Izzy prostuje plecy, a jego twarz zamienia się w maskę, zacierając ślady zainteresowania tym, co właśnie zobaczył.

– Jimenez! Archie! Co to za opierdalanie się?! Znaleźlibyście sobie jakieś zajęcie!

Jim uśmiecha się, przyciągając Archie jeszcze bliżej, noga pomiędzy jej udami i och, Archie zna tę grę.

– *Jesteśmy* zajęci, stary – odpowiada Jim. Archie kryje uśmieszek w szyi Jima, przesuwa językiem w górę, smakując sól i pot. Adrenalina i podniecenie buzują w jej ciele.

Archie czuje, że *żyje*.

Izzy patrzy na nich z kamienną twarzą. – W środku wichury, serio? Nie jesteście nic lepsi niż Ed.

– Co jest, *hombrecito*, zazdrosny jesteś? – żartuje Jim. – Mówiliśmy ci, że mamy miejsce dla jeszcze jednej osoby w pokoju, Olu nie będzie miał nic przeciwko.

Izzy waha się przez moment, osobliwy wyraz na jego twarzy, ale wtedy fala uderza w statek, zmiatając ich wszystkich z nóg.

– Jesteśmy bezpieczni! – krzyczy Blackbeard. Archie prycha z niedowierzaniem.

– Co? Wcale nie jesteśmy? – mówi, na tyle cicho, że pewnie nikt poza Jimem jej nie słyszy. – Dalej jesteśmy w środku—

Nagle, statek staje w miejscu, kołysząc się łagodnie na falach. Izzy podnosi się z mokrego pokładu, śląc Archie znudzone spojrzenie. – Mówiłaś coś?

Archie patrzy w niebo. Ponad nimi, chmury są wciąż ciemne i skłębione, ale promień słońca przebija się przez nie, kąpiąc *Revenge* we wspaniałych odcieniach żółci. – Co, kurwa? – mamrocze Archie.

Blackbeard schodzi po schodach, wyraźnie zemdlony Stede tuż za nim.

– Chodź, Izzy, lecimy sprawdzić co tam u Jacka! – mówi Blackbeard. Izzy jęczy.

– Musimy?

– Tak!

Izzy wlecze się za Edem i Stedem, rzucając krótkie spojrzenie w kierunku Jima i Archie. Przez moment wydaje się jej, że widzi uśmiech na jego twarzy, ale Izzy odwraca się do nich plecami zbyt szybko, żeby mogła się upewnić.

Ranger również wynurza się z burzy i Archie słyszy odległy okrzyk radości. Na dziobie dostrzega małą, rozentuzjazmowaną sylwetkę. Blackbeard wrzeszczy w odpowiedzi, opuszczając szalupę o wiele za szybko, żeby było to bezpieczne.

Kiedy postać na dziobie krzyczy coś w ich kierunku, Jim wyrzuca z siebie kolejne przekleństwo.

– Jebać to. Idziemy poszukać Olu – mówi Jim. Archie wzrusza ramionami.

– Myślisz, że Izzy się kiedyś do nas przyłączy? – pyta, podniecona, kiedy schodzą pod pokład. Poirytowanie Jima zamienia się w śmiech, jasny i perlisty.

– Wiem tyle co ty, *cariño* – odpowiada Jim, łapiąc Archie za rękę.

two fools on a ship (and a really good coat)

Written by ewelinakl

Rating: T

Beta credit: Sweven

Summary:

A storm brings Ed and Jack together. They make up. Sort of.

Stede can't say he's thrilled to see Calico.

Calico doesn't seem excited to see him, either.

They both try to remain polite for Ed's sake, just like the first time around. Now, however, it won't be Stede's ship that will suffer in the wake of their encounter; he can always take the dinghy and go back to the *Revenge* if he feels uncomfortable in the current company, which is a significant improvement over the last time.

Given how their last meeting ended, you'd think there would be some bad blood between Ed and Jack, but Ed just whoops and throws himself into Jack's open arms, slapping him on the back with enough force to rattle his ribs and spine.

"You fucking bastard!" Ed shouts excitedly. "Knew you'd survive somehow!"

“You fucking didn’t,” Jack replies, shoving Ed. Stede can’t quite tell if it’s playful or angry. “I almost fucking died.”

“But you didn’t,” Ed points out. “I think we should celebrate.”

Apparently, the celebration consists of what looks like a genuine fistfight in which they both end up with bloody noses and scraped knuckles. Stede steps as far away from the two of them as he can, not wanting to get caught up in the mess.

“Why are they like this?” he asks Izzy, sitting on a barrel nearby.

“Easier than talking about big things,” Izzy says with a shrug. His wooden leg is stretched out before him, the other one crossed over it. “The damage is less permanent.”

“What sort of logic is that?” Stede scoffs, shaking his head. Izzy gives him a long look, mouth curled in a smirk. “What?”

“Nothing,” Izzy says.

His gaze moves back to Ed and Jack, who are currently rolling around the deck, trying to pin the other down. Stede is no expert, but they seem to be breaking every single rule of wrestling. The floor is already smeared with blood and it only gets worse when Ed manages to grab Jack by the hair and smash his nose into the wood. He lets out a triumphant cry, loosening his grip and Jack immediately throws back his head, hitting Ed hard enough to cut his brow open.

“Should we intervene?” Stede asks, pressing against the stair railing to keep himself upright in case his knees buckle underneath him.

“Nah,” Izzy replies, watching the bloodbath like one might observe a bug crawling along the window frame, wondering whether it will escape or stay trapped inside. “Let them blow off some steam. They won’t really hurt each other.”

Stede feels like his and Izzy’s definitions of ‘really hurting someone’ differ dramatically. The way Ed grinds Jack’s face into the deck definitely qualifies as ‘real violence’ by Stede’s standards.

“Teach, you bastard, I’ll make you lick this deck clean if you don’t stop at once.”

Stede turns his head so fast that his neck erupts with white-hot pain that blinds him for a second. The soft afterglow of it only makes the approaching figure seem more ethereal. He needs to blink a few times to get the man’s red hair to stop looking like a flame, but even then, the cut of his black coat is divine, accentuating his narrow waist, billowing dramatically around his calves. Stede would kill for this coat. Not literally, but… Well, *maybe* literally. If there was no other way.

Ed lifts his head to glance in the man’s direction. His grin is wide and absolutely unhinged. There’s blood between his teeth. Stede doesn’t want to know how it got there.

“Charlie fucking Vane,” Ed calls, rolling off Jack’s back. “It’s been a while.”

Stede feels cold all of a sudden. Charles Vane? *That* Charles Vane? The infamously cruel Captain Vane?

“Yeah,” Vane drawls, staring Ed down. “I wish it was longer.”

Jack cackles, pushing himself up and wiping his face on a sleeve. It doesn’t help much since blood is still spurting from his nose and split lip.

Vane sighs, rolling his eyes. “You’re such an idiot,” he says. “Hello, Mr Hands,” he adds, bowing his head ever so slightly as he looks at Izzy, who responds in kind.

“Captain Vane,” he says, making Vane curl his lips in a smile. There’s something feline about it, a smugness that Stede finds fascinating.

“And you are?” Vane asks, arching one red brow as he turns to Stede. His face is all sharp angles but his eyes are sharper still. Even without the stories, Stede would know to be wary of this man. The stories make him gulp and forget to breathe for a second.

“Stede Bonnet, the Gentleman Pirate,” he chokes out, at last, extending his hand.

Vane doesn't shake it, just glances down at it with a mocking smirk. "Who the fuck came up with that?" he asks.

Stede pulls the hand back, flexing and relaxing his fingers. "Well," he says. "I did. Originally. But now everyone—"

"Who's *everyone*?" Vane cuts in.

"Well, Ed and Izzy, and…" Stede hesitates, trying to recall if anyone else ever called him by this moniker. There's his crew, of course, but they might not be credible enough.

Vane rolls his eyes. "Yeah, thought so," he mutters. "Anyway. Charles Vane. No stupid title to go with it."

If he had a title to go with it, it would have something to do with death, Stede thinks. "Pleasure to meet you, Captain," he says.

He foolishly expects Vane to be civil, even if it's nothing but a facade. All he gets, however, is a derisive snort. "Is it?" Vane asks, upper teeth bared, pressing into his bottom lip. It would pass as a smile on anyone else's face. On Vane's, it looks like a warning. "What's so pleasant about meeting me, pray-tell?" he asks.

Stede falters, not sure how to answer. Every possibility feels equally dangerous, like there's no safe way out of this situation.

"Stop being a bastard, Charlie," Ed says, stepping closer. His brow is still bleeding, his hand hovering close to his pistol. "Stede's just being polite. You could try it sometimes."

Vane's eyes lock on Ed then, dreadfully cold, deadly. "Funny you should teach me about manners when you show up on my ship uninvited and make a mess of my deck *and* my quartermaster," he drawls.

Ed shrugs, blowing a raspberry. "The deck can be cleaned and it's not like Jack needs his nose and mouth to do his job."

"That's where you're wrong, Eddie," Jack says, his voice nasal and wet but unmistakably amused. He steps closer, wrapping his arms around Vane's shoulders. Stede wants to scream at the thought of this beautiful coat getting

soiled with blood. “My mouth is *very* useful for some of my tasks,” he adds, his lips nearly brushing Vane’s ear.

Ed’s jaw slacks and Vane chuckles softly at the sight, reaching back to pet Jack’s hair. More blood drops from Jack’s nose onto Vane’s sleeve and Stede can’t hold back the pained groan any longer. Once the blood dries, it will be nearly impossible to get rid of the stains.

“What the fuck is your problem?” Vane asks, glancing in his direction.

“He’s ruining your coat,” Stede replies. “It’ll be—”

He doesn’t get to finish because Vane starts laughing. It’s loud and genuine, bringing tears to his eyes. “What the fuck?” he gasps after a moment. “*This* is what you get into such a tizzy over?” he asks, grabbing the bottom edge of his coat and bringing it to Jack’s face, gently dabbing at his swollen nose, still dripping blood. Stede winces at the sight and Vane laughs again.

“I told you he’s a pathetic excuse for a pirate,” Jack says, voice muffled by the fabric and still very nasal.

“Take that back, asshole,” Ed snarls, reaching for his pistol, but Vane is even quicker than him, his gun already cocked and pointed at Ed’s head.

“Put that thing away, Teach,” he drawls. “And don’t you *ever* dare threaten me or my crew again.”

Ed doesn’t lower his gun, face set in some grim determination and Stede has to grab him by the wrist and pull it down. He doesn’t want to die. Not here, not now.

“The gentleman has some common sense, at least,” Vane quips, putting his pistol away and returning to wiping Jack’s face clean. His expression is more and more sour by the second. “You really let that fucker break your nose?” he mutters, shaking his head in disbelief. “Show me your teeth.”

Jack does as he’s told. “’Twas an honourable duel,” he mumbles around Vane’s thumb, gently prodding inside his mouth.

Vane takes a deep breath through his nose, looking from Jack’s battered face to Ed’s brow that only just stopped bleeding. “Sure,” he mutters. “At least

your teeth are fine. And I'm sure Mr Kilby can fix your nose." Jack groans at the suggestion and Vane gives him a sharp look. "You'll snore even worse if it heals badly. So either you get it fixed, or you're sleeping in your own fucking cabin."

Jack huffs, shoulders sagging. "Make him give me some opium before he sets it straight, at least?"

"No," Vane replies with a smile. It's even more deadly than his glares, but Jack seems completely unbothered by that.

"What made you so cranky?" he asks, pouting in a way even Stede has to admit is rather adorable. "Got water in your boots? Or is it about that pretty French ship?" Vane's lips press in a thin line, his nose twitching. Jack smiles fondly. "Aww, don't worry, baby, we'll get you another one," he coos.

"I want *that one*," Vane says petulantly.

Suddenly, Stede understands what makes Vane so dangerous. He's like a child — peevish, moody and unpredictable. Add to that all the power and influence he has as a captain, and you've got a monster.

Jack laughs softly. "Alright, kitty-cat, we'll get you that one, then," he agrees. Vane curls his mouth in disbelief. "It can't be that far away, and we're twice as fast," Jack says. "Too heavy to escape the current in time, so the storm must've hit it head-on. With the direction of the wind…"

Jack trails off for a moment, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully. He plucks the telescope from Vane's belt. He pulls out the drawers and adjusts the lenses, scanning the horizon where the dark clouds are still rolling low over water. Then he flashes his blood-stained teeth in a grin.

"Yep," he says, self-satisfied. "There she is. Lost a mast, so we don't need to hurry."

"You do if you want to catch her before I do," Ed says, grinning as he cracks his knuckles. "Come on, Izzy. Stede."

Jack snorts, reopening the cut in his lip. "Good luck trying to catch up in that fucking walnut," he says.

“Is that a challenge?” Ed asks, raising his brows, which causes blood to drip down his face again.

Jack glances back at Vane, who reaches out for the telescope. He adjusts the lenses, his lips curling in a wicked smile. “Sure, Teach, let’s make it a challenge,” he agrees. “I might even leave you some scraps if you’re not too far behind.”

Ed laughs, sniffing at the air, as he takes a good look at Vane’s ship. “Accepted,” he says. “Come on, guys, we’ve got a prize on our hands,” he adds, wrapping an arm around Stede’s waist. “No cheating!” Ed shouts as they’re about to descend into their dinghy.

“Too late, asshole!” Jack shouts back.

Ed starts rowing them back to the *Revenge* as soon as all three of them settle down. He’s doing his best, but then they hear Jack’s voice again. “Come on, lads, hoist the anchors and ready the sails. We’ve got a race to win,” he bellows.

“Bastard!” Ed snaps.

“They would outrun us even if we started at the same time,” Izzy remarks, grabbing the other pair of oars.

“Way to spoil the fun, man,” Ed mutters, rolling his eyes.

When the *Ranger* starts moving, Stede loses his balance and falls into Izzy’s lap. The ripple it sends across the water rocks their dinghy.

Jack leans over the railing, a pasty blob with no distinct features by now.

“See you later, losers!” he yells.

“Get fucked!” Ed yells back, laughter distorting the words.

They all watch Vane’s ship take on speed and move towards the French barquentine. If Stede squints, he can see another figure besides Jack, motionless and majestic, with fiery hair and a fabulous coat billowing in the wind.

Divine Trinity

Written by Jackeline Harkness

Rating: T

Beta credit: reechiebun

Summary:

The Gentleman is the local but ever-expanding underground boss. Under him work The Prince, The Princess, and a sadistic enforcer known as The Dog.

An undercover detective has finally managed to infiltrate their ranks.

David stared, his fingers absentmindedly fidgeting with the buttons of his denim jacket.

Was this really it? A recently closed restaurant, still fully equipped, and just gone up as available for rent? It was expected that lots of interested people would be showing up to look at it and visit it only once. Nobody would pay it any attention. He had to admit, it was smart. Hell, it was fucking genius. No wonder they had never made any progress in pinpointing the meeting place.

"Hey, Max, help us with the chairs, will you?"

"Yeah, of course," David snapped out of his frozen state upon hearing his assumed name, and went to help move the furniture. Most of the tables were carried into the storage, leaving only a couple against one wall; the chairs were arranged in a semicircle, leaving an aisle of sorts down the middle and

an open space up front. Two men knelt there, polishing the already clean floor with honest to God waxed rags.

"What is that about?" David asked Lucius as he walked by, carrying a tray of snacks to the tables. There were also soft drinks being readied. It felt more like a company seminar than any sort of organized crime. In his experience, meetings tended to be small and quick, when they happened at all. What was this nonsense?

The young man followed his gaze to where the two guys were done polishing a wide spot on the floor. A white sheepskin rug was being carried in, set in that place.

"Oh, that. The last time the Dog's clothes got ruined by some leftover dirt, The Gentleman was pissed," Lucius leaned closer. "He can be such a bitch about clothes. Trust me, it's better this way," and he was gone to continue carrying food trays, like that was supposed to make any sense.

A large velvet armchair followed, being placed on top of the rug, then something that looked like an absurdly large footrest or a small divan was dragged in and placed in front and slightly off to the side of the armchair.

David approached Frenchie by the front row of chairs, and gave him a little smile. He let the nervousness and confusion show on his face. It had to be the expected reaction to the whole display, after all.

"Is there anything else I can help with?"

"Mh? Oh, no, that's alright," Frenchie checked his watch. "We've got it handled. Come on, let's get a seat."

David followed, sitting next to Frenchie in the front.

One of the men who'd dragged the armchair in, the bald one, made a quick circuit around the place spraying a woodsy scent all around.

"Perfectly on time," Frenchie said, checking his watch again, and smiled as all seats were taken.

"What now?" David asked.

"Now we wait. But it won't be long."

The shop's door opened, and the place went quiet as a grave. Nobody turned to look, even when the silence was broken by the distinct clatter of high-heeled shoes, so David forced himself to follow suit.

The big man at his side grinned, and subtly leaned in to whisper, "we get the Princess tonight!", like it was delightful news.

It took him stupidly long to recognize him, but David thought he deserved to be cut some slack. Yes, the tall, athletic figure, the well-groomed beard and the long silver-streaked hair were as distinct as always. But the way his hair was piled up in a messy bun, the now trimmed short beard, the long gloves, the purple dress, and the stiletto high heels were definitely new. At least, they were new for David. *Teach*.

"Breathtaking, isn't she?"

"Uh huh," was all David could get out, staring in disbelief as Teach went and sat on the divan. Wasn't he dead? Taken out when the new lord of the underworld came to claim the city? But the tattoos that peeked from under the velvety gloves were definitely the same, as were the bright, beautiful eyes, so incongruous with the psychopathic monster that was the Kraken.

What the fuck was going on?

When he laid eyes on The Gentleman himself, though, David felt like the floor had suddenly vanished from under his feet.

He was a tall blond, dressed in a tailored silvery blue suit and crisp white shirt, an actual silk cravat around his neck. The man was a mosaic of incongruences. On one hand, the attire was exactly the kind of over-the-top ridiculousness he expected from a crime lord, and there was an undeniable air of confidence around him. On the other hand, though, he looked… nothing like David would have ever expected.



Art by Xander

His attention was snagged by the figure that followed him just a couple of steps behind, dressed all in fancy black, wearing a single leather glove and a dog collar threaded through his shirt collar in place of a tie, the chain hooked to it disappeared into The Gentleman's pocket. And then, of course, was the mask: a shiny black leather piece, in the image of an imposing dog head. The shadows cast by the mask didn't let David see much, and all that was visible between the mask's high ears and straps were pierced ears and a bit of graying hair. He was short, but even through his three piece suit, it was evident that he was fast and powerful, dangerous like a wild animal five times his size. With one last surveying glance all around the room, the Dog seemed to be satisfied and flowed down to the rug, sitting next to the chair, by The Gentleman's feet.

David swallowed and tried to keep his composure as an idea exploded in his brain. If Teach was there… was it possible that the Dog was none other than Israel Hands? Teach's fearsome second in command, also long presumed dead?

"Well, hello," The Gentleman greeted them with a warm smile. "Thank you for coming today," he sat there in his velvet armchair, like a king, with two known killers flanking him, one dressed like a lady at a gala, and the other lying by his feet like a literal dog. And yet, he acted like it was all normal, like he was a teacher addressing his class. "I trust that you didn't run into any trouble?"

"None at all, everything's been fine. Sir," Lucius added the title as an afterthought.

"I'm glad to hear that. Now, we can go ahead and hear what's on the agenda?"

Lucius, from the front row on the other side of the aisle from David, pulled out a heavy book and started. David took mental note of any names to run them through the system later.

The Gentleman nodded, distractedly petting the Dog's hair with his fingertips.

"Item number six, is Wee John's trial," Lucius announced, and everyone seemed to pay special attention. "The team of lawyers has put together a solid

defense, and they are expecting a favorable resolution by next Thursday."

"Oh, that's good news," The Gentleman said, not lifting his eyes from his human pet. "Do we have insurance in place?"

"Of course, Sir. All but two members of the jury have been secured. There's no way we're losing."

At that, The Gentleman did lift his eyes, eyebrows raised in pleased surprise, and looked at one of the members.

"Great job, Jim."

"Thank you, Sir," the slim person in the trenchcoat shrugged like it was nothing, but the smile on their face was proud.

David felt a shudder down his spine as it clicked. John. They were talking about the arsonist. How had the jury been compromised like that? Perhaps they'd let that go in favor of using Feeney some other way to bring this whole operation down. As far as he knew, nobody had associated the arson case with The Gentleman.

"And finally, in item number seven, we have… the shelter. Also with good news, all but one of the pets have been placed in good homes," with a satisfied smile, Lucius closed the book.

"That's marvelous!" The Gentleman clapped once, a bright, sincere smile on his face.

"Which one is left?" asked Teach.

"Um…" Lucius turned to the man sitting next to David. "Fang?"

"Sybelle, she's a black kitty."

"If she gets along with dogs, maybe we can bring her home?" Teach turned his big, fawn eyes to The Gentleman, who beamed at him, grabbed his gloved hand, and kissed his knuckles.

"That sounds great, darling."

The room cheered.

David could hardly believe that this man, kissing knuckles like he'd just stepped out of an old stage play and talking about adopting kittens, was the one responsible for all the major headaches of the police department.

"Well, now that all of that is done," The Gentleman intertwined his fingers with Teach's, "maybe we can welcome our newcomer."

"Ah, yes," Frenchie stammered. "Uh… Sir, this is Maxwell Taylor, he's been a great help with local distribution for the past…"

"Maxwell Taylor?" The Gentleman interrupted, addressing David directly.

"Uh… yes, Sir," was he supposed to stand up or something?

"What is it that they say about people with two given names?" the blond asked no one in particular.

"That they're not to be trusted," said Teach, almost lazily, fingers playing with the pearls of his necklace.

"Right, that's it, darling. Thank you," he paused, apparently only for dramatic effect. Going by the way David's heart started beating like a war drum, it was more effective than it should. The monster's blond head tilted to the side, looking genuinely curious, "then why choose such a name for an undercover operation?"

David shot up to his feet, and so did everyone else on the chairs, forming a menacing ring around him.

"You're a pig?"

"Honestly. Trying to play us? Not cool, man."

David tried to remember protocol. If the operation was blown, then survival was the next objective.

"I don't…" he tried.

"Cut the crap," Teach turned his dark eyes on him, and David understood why

people had been so terrified of the Kraken. Even sounding bored, dressed like an expensive whore and wearing glittery makeup, his sole presence promised suffering so bad that death would be a welcome reprieve. “I don’t want to be here too long.”

“There’s only…”

“Just let me get out of here, or you’ll be swamped by cops in a minute.”

The Dog growled, like an actual animal.

“Don’t interrupt him, mate,” Teach said.

“It is quite impolite,” the blond commented, like a bitchy neighbor complaining about autumnal leaves on his lawn. “Especially if it’s only to tell more lies, David.”

“So you know.”

Both The Gentleman and Teach gave him disappointed looks.

“Of course.”

“Then why?”

“Because there’s one thing I want you to tell me.”

“Make it two,” Teach suggested.

“Alright. Two.”

David tried to come up with something to say. Anything. His thoughts were racing in a hundred different ways at once, but nothing useful. He just shrugged.

“I want to know who sold the location of the house by the river.”

“What?”

“Someone sold that information. Made us lose almost five millions and a half in one single swoop. There were delays, rushed changes of plans, lots of inconveniences. So I want to know who was responsible for one of the worst weeks I’ve had in the past year; it gave me a terrible headache.”

David stared. The man was talking about millions on narcotics, an operation that left people dead on the ground, and he was complaining about a headache. He was completely deranged.

"You're going to kill me," came out of his mouth in a rush.

"No. I mean, don't take me wrong, you're going to die today. I'm just not going to kill you myself. Not in this pretty getup," he gestured to his fancy suit. "But I am a gentleman, David Parks…"

"You're a criminal."

"Yes," he smiled. "But I'm also a gentleman. I'm a man of my word. So when I say that you won't regret cooperating with me, I do mean it. You see, I'm offering you two options here: one, you can choose to cooperate. In that case, you will die fast and mostly without pain. I can guarantee it, my pet here is very efficient," he patted the Dog's head. "I know life is hard and unfair, especially for children who have to grow up without their parents for one reason or another…"

David opened his mouth to protest. It was one thing to threaten his own life, but his family…

"Easy, let me finish," he continued, raised hand and all. "Don't create more problems for us, and I'll make sure your family receives the support they deserve. Your wife and children don't need to suffer. I understand that you were just doing your job, so be a good lad and I'll make sure both your kids get scholarships to the schools of their choice, including university."

"Are you serious?"

"Option two" the madman continued, "you could refuse to cooperate. In which case, my puppy and the boys will extract the information from you. They're good, so I wouldn't recommend it. That choice doesn't come with any compensation or help for the family you decided to put in danger by making stupid decisions," he gave him a winning smile. "So, what do you say?"

Suddenly, this was very obviously the same monster that had delivered Ned

Low's head to the police station with a *You're welcome* note and two boxes of cupcakes.

It wasn't a choice.

"You swear you will? Help my family?"

"Of course. If there was any way to spare them the pain of your loss, I'd offer that, too. But in the present circumstances, I think this is the best I can do." He sounded so fucking reasonable.

David nodded, biting his cheek hard enough to flood his mouth with the metallic tang of blood.

The Gentleman rose from his seat, and the Dog was on his feet as fast as lightning.

"It is a deal, then," the blond offered his hand, and for a fragment of a second, David considered if he had any options. Teach had splayed his knees, making the black silk of the dress cascade between his legs, baring one thigh through the high slit on the rich fabric, leaving the gun strapped there in plain view. The Dog stood close, a blade had somehow materialized in his gloved hand. David forced himself to shake the offered hand.

"Deal."

"Good!" he returned to his seat. "Now, the name, David."

"Banes. Richard Banes."

"Huh," he leaned against the backrest, looking slightly surprised.

"Told you it was a matter of time," Teach commented.

"Indeed," The Gentleman sighed. "I do like to give people a chance. Some friends tell me it's a character flaw."

"Like you're giving me a chance now?" He knew it was stupid to taunt the man, but he couldn't help it.

"Actually, yes. You've been with us for four months now, that was plenty of

chance to come forward with the truth. And even now, I'm giving you the chance to do something for your family."

David bit his wounded cheek again.

"You had a question, darling?"

"Ah, yeah," Teach sat up a little. "Who was the genius that decided to put you up to this?"

"What?"

"Who's the head of this little operation of yours?" David was surprised to hear the low voice from the Dog, just barely muffled by the mask. It was a very distinct voice, and one he definitely recognized.

"Hands…"

"Ah, you know each other?" The Gentleman inquired, as if they were all friends meeting by chance at a party.

"We've met," Hands said, succinctly.

"That's fortunate. That way you know exactly that I'm telling the truth, David. Give my darling the answer she wants, and my puppy will take good care of you."

David felt cold sweat wash over his body. He'd seen a couple of bodies and dozens of photographs of Hands' work. Twice, it had been bad enough that the fucking ME had been sick.

"Captain Masterson," he volunteered.

"Yeah, it tracks," Teach nodded. "He a personal friend for you?"

"No, just… just my captain."

"Well, we'll take care of him," the blond said, and David felt more than saw a few others nod at those words. "And with that, I think we're done!" he declared happily.

Hands walked around him, and David had to fight not to launch himself at the

man. His whole body was trembling.

As if a work meeting had been adjourned, everyone broke off from their stance, gravitating towards the fucking snack table.

He didn't expect the jacket to be pulled off his shoulders, down to his elbows and twisted to restrain his arms behind his back. The startled, choked scream that left his throat didn't quite register in his mind.

"Just one thing!"

"Yes?" The Gentleman asked, frozen with one hand gallantly extended towards Teach as if to help him up from his seat.

"What's your name?"

The smile was warm, sincere, as if he hadn't just ordered his execution.

"Stede Bonnet," he gave him a shallow bow, all poised elegance, before addressing Hands. "Iz, pup, please be quick and wash your hands. I'll make you a plate."

"Yes, Master."

David didn't even think about resisting as he was pushed towards the back, to the restaurant's kitchen.

"This can be the worst part, you know? The waiting. You know what I can do, I can see it in your eyes. But He was telling the truth, I can be very quick… if I want to. So this is your call. Be good, and I'll be good, Mr. Parks."

The hands pushing him down onto his knees were firm, but not rough. David didn't resist, and for a moment he looked at the drain in the tiled floor, just a few centimeters from his knees, and he understood. Then, he squeezed his eyes shut.

Fic Section - E-Rated



Reciprocity

Written by Jam

Rating: E

Beta credit: frazzledwriter

Major tags: Macro/micro

Summary:

Izzy, a member of the fae, is caught in a web. In order to be taken to safety, he makes a deal with a witch, Stede.

The webs that held Izzy were firm, and despite how much he struggled, his wings couldn't untangle from the fine strands. He had been fighting them for what felt like ages, and he could tell that he had ripped his wings in multiple places during his attempts to escape. Even if he did manage to get down, he wouldn't be able to fly anywhere.

He was going to die.

No one knew where he was. Izzy had been so certain that it would be a quick errand, retrieving extra food to bolster the community's stores, so he had snuck out without telling anyone, certain that no one would notice him missing. It might be days before anyone realized he was gone—by then there would be no chance of saving him.

Izzy had accepted his fate, but he still flinched when a large shadow appeared

over him, blocking out his view of the sun. He closed his eyes, sending himself further into darkness. Maybe if he didn't see the spider's bite coming, it wouldn't hurt as much. He could drift off into oblivion, numbed by the venom, unaware he had even passed.

Instead of the pinch of a bite he had expected, however, a crushing force wrapped around his whole body, jostling his injured wings and making him cry out in pain.

"Oh, goodness! What do we have here? Pathetic little fairy, aren't you?" Opening his eyes, Izzy was met with a face as large as his whole body right in front of him, eyes sliding over Izzy's body in what felt like a calculating manner.

"Fuck off." Izzy didn't like being manhandled. Whatever this human wanted, Izzy would rather die than give it to him. He probably thought Izzy could grant wishes or could make him fly or some other such rot.

His biting tone earned him nothing but a snort, the human rolling his eyes and tightening his fist in what he likely thought was a gentle manner, but which made his grip tight enough that Izzy held back a scream. "Well that isn't very charming, is it? I saved your life, and all I get for my trouble is a 'fuck off'? I suppose if you want to die that badly, I'll leave you here."

Faster than Izzy expected, he was placed on the ground. The human wiped the hand that had been holding Izzy on his pants, grimacing and swatting at the spot as webbing clung to the fabric. Standing quickly, the man gave Izzy one last look before turning away.

He couldn't believe the human had given up so easily—he was actually going to leave Izzy alone?

Despite how much he told himself that he was uncaring about his fate, watching his only chance of salvation take its first step away was too much for Izzy to take. "Wait!!!"

The man turned back immediately, crouching down and holding out a hand towards Izzy. Evidently he wasn't planning on scooping him up again. "Would you like to come with me after all, then? Your chances of survival are rather

abysmal out here, especially with two damaged wings. If you'd like me to take you home, you simply need to tell me where to go."

"As if I'd lead you right to my colony? You must be a fool." The mere prospect of such a thing made Izzy scoff, and though the human scrunched up his nose at the noise, Izzy thought there was a glint of humor in the curve of his lips. Feeling emboldened by the response, Izzy crawled onto the extended hand, clinging to the thumb as it raised him to eye level again.

"Well then, you bossy little thing, what would you like me to do with you? I can't leave you here, I can't take you back to where you belong… are you trying to come home with me to kill me in my sleep?"

Izzy snorted. He couldn't help it, the idea was so ridiculous. Fairies could be dangerous, certainly, but his magic would be extremely limited while injured, and fairies only attacked humans in groups, and only when their territory was invaded. If he wanted to kill the human, taking him to his colony would have been the much easier method, though he would never want to bring a human back to the other fairies without proper warning. "Take me back with you if you want. I give you my word I won't harm you, so long as you don't harm me."

"I accept." Izzy flinched as he felt the deal snap in place. The human must know something about the fae, then, to jump on a deal so quickly. Izzy assumed that meant the man also knew he couldn't lie, and that Izzy would be able to tell if he lied in turn. At least the agreement was in his favor—if the human harmed him, even accidentally, he would be able to defend himself.

Looking up at the man, he was smiling, seemingly pleased with himself for managing to trick a member of the fae into a deal. Izzy ordinarily wouldn't have let himself make such a bold statement without thinking it through, but his injuries had clouded his judgement and he would have to live with the consequences. Luckily, the man didn't seem to have any ill intentions, though there was no way for Izzy to be certain of that fact. He could only hope his intuition was correct as the human began walking back towards his dwelling.

The next few weeks with Bonnet were much more peaceful than Izzy had anticipated. Apparently the man wasn't any ordinary human; he was a mage, which explained his understanding of fae creatures. Evidently he wasn't sure if any of his healing salves or spells would work on a fairy since he had never encountered one before, and he was unwilling to risk it on the off chance that doing so would go against the rules of their deal.

Bonnet was a cautious man, but he was also oddly flamboyant, picking flowers to place throughout his home and sewing clothes to fit Izzy's tiny form when he realized that the garments he had been wearing upon being caught in the web were rather ruined from his struggles. It seemed he wasn't a well renowned spellcaster, as no one came to his home looking for potions or charms in the weeks that Izzy was there, but Bonnet seemed at peace with that.

He had enough sense not to give Izzy his true name, insisting that "Bonnet" was good enough. In return, Izzy introduced himself as "Basilica," a childhood nickname that he hadn't used in many millennia.

Life with Bonnet was peaceful, and as Izzy neared the day he would be able to remove the bandages covering his wings, he found himself sinking into melancholy, realizing that he would miss the idiotic man. He was unafraid to verbally spar with Izzy, but he was never violent despite his occasional inclination towards biting remarks. He was an incompetent idiot, but it was clear that he was doing his best to learn how to be a proper mage, though Izzy could only imagine that was difficult without a proper spellcaster to teach him. Above all else, he was soft and passionate and bright, and Izzy hated the thought of that light being hidden from the world with no one to witness it if he left.

No one else ever came to the cabin. Occasionally, Izzy heard Bonnet conversing with friends on a spyglass in his chambers, but surely contact with others only using such rudimentary methods couldn't be sufficient for a man who put all of his energy into any given conversation. Izzy wondered how lonely Bonnet must have been before Izzy joined his household. He wondered how lonely he would be after Izzy left.

The week that Izzy was meant to remove his bandages, he was feeling more and more reluctant to leave, but he wasn't sure how to bring up the issue. Bonnet had never mentioned that his welcome extended past the removal of his bandages, and Izzy didn't want to presume that Bonnet actually wanted his company. He had almost determined that it wasn't worth it to mention his desire to stay, too afraid of being told he wasn't welcome, until he heard Stede conversing on the spyglass one afternoon.

"-don't know, Lucius, surely that isn't a good idea!" Stede sounded distressed, and Izzy felt his claws start to extend reflexively, wanting to attack whoever was causing such a feeling.

"All I'm saying is—you're lonely out in that stupid cabin, and having this fairy stay with you has been good for you. You've been happier than I've ever seen you with him there. Clearly you're good at avoiding making deals or giving yourself up if you've gone without fucking up for this long, so talking one of the fairies in the markets into going home with you wouldn't be hard. They're there to go home with people. And they think they can trick them into giving them your true name while they fuck them, but if you can avoid that, you can have some conversation and also have a little fun while you're at it." The voice that answered Bonnet was one that Izzy had heard before—Spriggs, a friend Bonnet spoke to at least once a week.

The things Spriggs was saying weren't the kinds of topics he and Bonnet usually discussed, however. Generally, if Izzy passed by during their calls, they were discussing recent breakthroughs in their studies and gossiping about the people back wherever Bonnet had come from. It was generally mindless conversation, and Izzy tuned it out, but this was different. They were talking about him.

Izzy was familiar with fairies that lurked in markets. They were usually young, eager things, trying to prove themselves by tricking a human into giving them their true name. It bolstered their magic, and some fairy tribes saw it as a rite of passage to get a human under their thrall in such a way, so existing so visibly in the marketplace made it easy for those young fairies to pass their trials. Izzy had never seen the point of it, knowing that, to be granted their true name, one

often had to break down a human's walls. Humans went into interactions with fairies trying to avoid giving themselves away, and the easiest way to lower their inhibitions was to fuck them and force them to out themselves while their guard was down.

The thought of some fairy taking advantage of Bonnet that way made Izzy feel nauseous—even if Bonnet could avoid giving his name away, Izzy hated the thought of any other fairy seeing him so exposed. They didn't deserve to fuck him, nevermind to learn his true name. If any fairy was going to be fucking Bonnet, it was going to be Izzy. Not that Bonnet even wanted to fuck a fairy. Spriggs might be talking nonsense.

"My boy, just because I'm attracted to one fairy doesn't mean I'm attracted to all of them. I've never even had feelings like this before! I'm sure they'll go away once he's gone. I'll go back to enjoying my solitude. If you're so interested in hearing about someone fucking a fairy, have one of your boyfriends do it and they can tell you the tale." Clearly, Bonnet wasn't amused by the way the conversation was going. Izzy couldn't help but agree with his curt tone, though his brain was caught in a loop of Stede admitting that he was attracted to him. He might not have ever fucked a human in his youth, but that didn't mean he was unwilling.

Quietly, he snuck in through a crack in the door. He had sensed a lie in Bonnet's words around his certainty that his feelings would go away once Izzy left. If Bonnet really felt so strongly, and Izzy wanted him as well, there was no reason he shouldn't approach openly, but he wanted to hear how the rest of the conversation progressed first.

"Don't get snippy with me just because you're frustrated, babe. You and I both know how you feel about that fae, and I'm just trying to help you out so you don't get yourself hurt. I would rather you not get dragged into the woods and murdered by a pack of fairies, you know. I'd never even know what happened to you! Do you know how traumatic that would be for me?"

"I know, I know. I appreciate that you care. I just need to let him go, though. My feelings don't matter." He truly meant that. Bonnet thought his feelings didn't matter? That was fucking ridiculous.

The magic of a deal breaking hurt, apparently. Izzy should have expected that. The pain lanced through him as he bit Bonnet on the ankle, removing protection from him and throwing him back from Bonnet, leaving him sprawled on the ground.

"Ouch, oh my goo- Lucius, I have to go. I'll call you back later." Before Spriggs could respond, Bonnet shut down the connection of his spyglass, falling to his knees to the ground to scoop Izzy into his hands. Izzy felt completely boneless, magic still pumping through his veins, reminding him that Bonnet could claim whatever he wanted in return for Izzy breaking their deal. "What did you do that for, Basilica? There are easier ways of telling me that my conversation was… inappropriate, rather than biting me like some feral creature!"

Looking up, Bonnet's cheeks were stained bright red, clearly embarrassed that Izzy had overheard his conversation. Evidently, the embarrassment was so prevalent that Bonnet hadn't even realized their deal had broken. He really was a fucking idiot.

"The deal, twat. Don't you feel it?" Izzy's words were slurred from the force of the magic, but evidently they were still enough to convey to Bonnet what had happened.

"Why… what am I supposed to ask for?"

"Whatever you want. That's how it works." Izzy could only hope that Bonnet wouldn't ask for anything too ridiculous, but he had put his trust in him.

Bonnet seemed to consider his options for a few moments, stroking along Izzy's wings gently. He had learned a lot about how much pressure he could exert on Izzy without causing discomfort since their first meeting, and the feeling of his caress was pleasurable enough to make Izzy moan. "Your name. Your true name. That's what I want."

Izzy gulped. He had been afraid of that. But he couldn't deny Bonnet—the magic would force it from him if he resisted. "Israel. Israel Hands. But I go by Izzy, usually."

"Israel." Bonnet whispered the word, and it sent a shiver down Izzy's spine,

feeling magic brewing in the air at the sound of it. With the broken deal, Bonnet could ask Izzy for any one thing, but with his name, Bonnet could make him do anything.

"I'm Stede Bonnet. It's a pleasure to meet you, Israel Hands." Izzy's jaw dropped. Bonnet—STEDE, had just given him his true name. The magic of it entwined in the air with Izzy's own, causing sparks. Neither of them had any control over the other with both names shared. There was no reason for Stede to do such a thing.

"Why would you do that?"

"Well, fae only seduce humans to earn their true name, right? Now I know that, if you really want me to be able to take advantage of what you overheard, you'll be submitting to me of your own volition, not because you want anything from me." Despite Stede's usual excitable attitude, there was something serious in the way he stared Izzy down, as if waiting for a rejection. Izzy had broken their deal to get to this point—Stede admitting his interest bluntly wasn't going to scare him off.

Standing up, Izzy flicked his wings, which had been fully healed by the magic of sharing true names, removing his bandages. With Stede's eyes locked on his every movement, fear still lurking in their depths, he flew over to the giant bed in the middle of the room. "I only submit willingly. And I want to fuck you. So get over here, Stede."

The speed with which Stede scrambled over to the bed, removing his clothes along the way, was almost enough to make Izzy worry he had inadvertently issued an order. However, Stede's eyes were clear when he took Izzy in hand, placing him on his pelvis. From there, Izzy could easily wrap his arms around Stede's penis, which was approximately his height.

Stede groaned immediately, bucking his hips hard enough to make Izzy stumble and grip him harder.

"Be careful, twat!" Izzy really didn't want to fall and injure his wings right after they had finished healing.

Gently, Izzy felt a fist wrap around him, letting him lift his legs to wrap around Stede's dick, essentially stroking it with his whole body. He felt the surface in front of him moisten, and looking at the sparkle of magic in the air, he realized Stede had used a lubrication spell. "Is that better?"

Izzy could only nod, nibbling at the base of the head in front of him.

Stede rutted against him for a few minutes, the movement of skin on skin stimulating Izzy's own dick, Stede's fingers stroking his wings, and Izzy didn't know if he had ever felt greater bliss than the outpouring of magic the moment they both came.

It was the work of seconds for Stede to clean them both with magic, pulling Izzy up to rest on his chest.

"You're staying, right?" Stede's voice was quiet, but more confident than before. Izzy was glad to hear it.

"Of course I'm staying. Fucking idiot. Can't risk you giving your name out to anyone else. You're mine."

"Good. You're mine, as well."

Like that, they fell asleep, equals.

A Discreet Assignation

Written by Unopposablethumbs

Rating: E

Major tags: Infidelity

Beta credit: queenclio

Summary:

Izzy and Stede are having an affair with rather less discretion than they might believe—can a little intervention from the crew save three idiots who are all pining for each other?

Izzy hisses as Stede's teeth graze his pulse point, tilting his head, an invitation. Stede's hand tightens around his throat, thick cock grinding into his ass, Stede's other hand gripping Izzy's hip hard enough to bruise. Izzy's fingers scrabble at the rough wood of the storeroom door Stede pressed him up against as soon as it closed behind them.

"Needed to talk about the inventory, eh?" he'd sneered—it got the desired result, Stede snarling, pushing him into the wood face first, yanking roughly at his trouser laces.

Now, trousers around his knees, Izzy arches his back, pushing into Stede's thrusts.

Weeks, they've been doing this. Weeks since furtive glances, brief touches during training sessions, the parry and blow of sniping conversations turned to

hot breath on skin, rutting together in storerooms and supply closets.

Izzy wonders if Stede thinks they're being discreet—he knows for certain they're not.

Edward pretends he hasn't noticed. As if Izzy hasn't left bruises up and down Stede's chest, a bite mark on his inner thigh, even. As if Ed wouldn't know exactly who left it there the instant he saw it. Izzy feels his heart in his throat every time he passes Ed in the hall, or catches him at the tail end of his watch. Ed never looks him in the eye, barely acknowledges he's on the ship.

Some sick, secret part of Izzy hoped this would change things. Ed would finally have to deal with him, drain the festering wound that was poisoning them both. Izzy still doesn't know when things went wrong. Before his leg. Before the toes. Before Stede fucking Bonnet.

Speaking of…

"You like that, don't you?"

Stede's lips brush his ear and Izzy can't help but whimper, empty cunt aching as Stede fucks his ass. He does like it, he really, really does, but that doesn't mean he's going to give the bastard the satisfaction of hearing him say it. Stede shifts his grip from Izzy's throat to his hair, pulling his head back sharply and, fuck, sometimes it feels like he can read Izzy's mind when they do this.

"I asked you a question, Izzy…" Stede's voice has gone hoarse, almost husky. Izzy wonders if this is how he talks when he fucks Ed. He moans, pulling against Stede's grip just a little, feeling the strength of it, the bright spots of pain as Stede tugs him back again. He hears the smirk in Stede's voice as he speaks again. "Feeling stubborn, are we? Well, I know how to deal with that."

Stede holds his hair tightly, fucking into him hard and fast as he pulls his other hand back. Izzy barely has time to suck in a breath before the first blow falls.

"Ah! Fuck!" he gasps as Stede spanks him. He whines as Stede continues, his ass burning hot, stinging as Stede only hits harder, pausing to dig his fingers into the bruised flesh.

"You know what I want to hear," he says. Izzy shakes his head as best he

can, still pulling against the hand fisted in his hair, lips pressed tight even as Stede's cock punches breathless little moans out of him. Stede clicks his tongue, overacting his annoyance as always. One of these days Izzy's going to tell him to drop the bloody theatrics. Today, though, Stede wraps his arm around Izzy's waist, reaching between his legs and whatever Izzy might have said is lost in a half-panicked moan.

"You brought this on yourself, you know," Stede says, smug fucking bastard, and then his hand slaps down on Izzy's cunt. Izzy shouts, gasping and whimpering as Stede spanks his cunt, fucking his ass relentlessly. Stede wraps a hand around his throat again, squeezing hard enough to make sparks dance in Izzy's vision. Tension builds in his belly, cunt squeezing, empty, as Stede spanks it, the sound wet and filthy in the storeroom. "You like it, don't you Izzy?"

He relaxes his grip on Izzy's throat just enough for Izzy to suck in a rough breath.

"Fuck!" he gasps, "Yes, fuck, yes, I like it!"

"Good boy," Stede whispers, pressing two fingers into Izzy's cunt, grinding the heel of his hand against Izzy's cock as he curls his fingers to catch Izzy's g-spot. Izzy's eyes roll back in his head, and he chokes off a shout as his cunt pulses, legs barely supporting him.

Stede's thrusts stutter, and he groans as he comes, grinding into Izzy's ass. They stand against the wall, chests heaving as they catch their breath. Stede wraps one arm around Izzy's hips, the other around his chest, lips moving slowly, aimlessly down the back of Izzy's neck. It feels gentle. Intimate. Izzy squeezes his eyes shut. He should put a stop to it. Of course, Stede's currently the only reason he's still on his feet—well, foot and hoof. Stede's cock slips free, come rolling down Izzy's inner thighs and he shifts uncomfortably.

"Oh!" Stede says, sounding genuinely mortified. "Sorry!"

He lowers Izzy to the floor.

"Is that a fucking pillow?" Izzy demands as Stede tucks something soft behind his back.

Stede looks smugger than ever as he produces a warm, damp cloth from who-the-fuck-knows-where. Izzy's been lowered into a kind of makeshift nest, soft blankets and pillows piled near the base of the door. He shifts, uncomfortable. It's not as though he doesn't already know Stede meant to fuck him in here, his attempt to "casually" order Izzy to join him for inventory about as believable as the rest of his acting. But something about the evidence that he'd thought ahead for Izzy's *comfort* of all things makes him feel like there's not enough air in the room.

"Never any harm in being prepared." Stede wipes Izzy's inner thighs clean, helping him back into his trousers. Izzy resists the urge to ask exactly how much "preparation" Stede's been putting into the rest of their little assignations—whatever the answer, he won't like it.

"Bonnet…" he says instead, a world of weariness in one word.

"I know," Stede interrupts. "It's just fucking."

Izzy nods stiffly, then reaches out a hand. He tries not to make eye contact as Stede reluctantly helps him up. He can't stand to see Stede's disappointment as he leaves. It feels heavier every time they do this. Of course the bastard would be a fucking cuddler.

"Right," Izzy says, tugging his vest straight. "Somebody's got to make sure this fucking ship doesn't run aground. Again."

Jim frowns as Izzy slips out of the storeroom, face flushed, hair tousled, shirt only half tucked in, all the more conspicuous for his attempted stealth. He's as bad an actor as Stede. Worse, maybe, and that's saying something. And now…

"How'd it go?"

Jim jumps as Frenchie comes up behind them too quickly.

"Puta madre, you fucking idiot, I could have fucking stabbed you!" they growl, tucking the knife they'd drawn back into their belt. Frenchie waves his hands in a distracted apology as he leans around to watch Izzy stomping away from

the storeroom, too out-of-sorts to notice them.

"That was quick," Frenchie says, frowning. A moment later, they watch as Stede slips out of the room, head hanging, blankets and pillows and what looks like a picnic basket dangling from his arms. He sighs deeply, looking down the corridor after Izzy, and then turns and heads back towards the captain's cabin. Frenchie clicks his tongue, looking almost as disappointed as Stede. "Okay. Not good, then."

Jim shakes their head, arms folded.

"Nope," they say, "ese idiotas aren't gonna figure it out on their own. Get the crew together, man—it's time for drastic measures."

Izzy splashes his face with cold water from the small, chipped basin in the first mate's cabin, pushing his hair back into place using a polished silver platter as a mirror. He sighs, grimacing at the circles under his eyes. He hasn't been getting much sleep these past few weeks, he supposes. Staying up late thinking about Ed. And Stede. And Ed and Stede. Idiot.

He tosses the platter down on the rickety table that serves as his desk, straightening his vest for what must be the dozenth time since he left Stede looking mournful in the midst of what looked dangerously like the beginning of a very pleasant picnic. Idiot.

Well, no time to worry about it. Someone really does have to keep this bloody ship afloat. Even if he does feel a little sick every time he walks away from Stede after one of their assignations. Even if he does want to fucking cry every time Ed turns and walks the opposite way when they happen to meet in the hall or on the deck. God.

Idiot.

He takes a deep breath, squares his shoulders, and throws his door open.

"Fuck!" he shouts, startled. Jim, spinning a knife idly between their fingers, stares at him impassively. "Fuck do you want, Jimenez?"

"You're asking the wrong questions, viejo," they say, knife disappearing up their sleeve as they step forward, boxing him back into his room. They close the door behind them, folding their arms, mysterious as you please. "I'm here so we can talk about what *you* want."

Stede washes his face in the en suite. The captains' quarters were empty when he came in—Ed must have gone up on deck for a change. Stede can't decide whether he's relieved or not. Ed must have noticed something. He and Izzy haven't exactly been discreet. He doesn't know what he's been hoping for. Some sort of confrontation. A chance to get it all out in the open. He looks in the mirror, grimacing at his reflection. So much for talking it through. Apparently fucking his boyfriend's first mate behind his back is more Stede's style.

"Fuck," he mutters. As if he doesn't already know that Izzy's more than Ed's first mate to him now. He pulls off his jacket, tossing it over the back of the divan as he steps back into his room. His and Ed's room. Not that they've been making much use of it together lately. It's practically a timeshare at this point. Of course, that started before he and Izzy started doing… whatever the hell it is they're doing. Not much, if Izzy's responses to Stede's overtures are anything to go by. The untouched picnic basket sits on the divan, next to the pile of pillows and blankets that Stede had hauled to the store room before their latest encounter.

God, what an idiot.

He sinks down on a chair and rests his head in his hands, wondering who he should pine for first, or whether he can be economical and pine for Izzy and Ed at the same time. He's become something of an expert piner over the past few months. He might as well challenge himself.

A knock at the door interrupts a particularly tortured sigh and Stede glares at it for a moment, offended. The knock sounds again.

"What is it?" he snaps, then jumps to his feet, running a hand through his hair

on the off chance that Izzy's changed his mind about the picnic, and maybe a bit of a cuddle. He clears his throat, trying to sound authoritative. "I mean, yes, enter!"

His voice cracks slightly—too deep. Damn.

The door cracks open and Stede slumps a bit, disappointed, as Lucius steps through.

"Oh. Lucius," he says. Lucius rolls his eyes, folding his arms.

"Well, don't sound too excited to see me," he says. Stede slumps back down on the chair, burying his head in his hands. Lucius sighs, turning his eyes to the ceiling in exaggerated frustration as he closes the door behind him. He pats Stede on the shoulder a little awkwardly. It feels more comforting than it should and Stede swallows around a sudden lump in his throat.

"I think I've made rather a mess of things," he says, and god, he's half-tempted to tell Lucius everything, the whole sordid tale…

"With Izzy and Ed, you mean?" Lucius asks, crinkling his nose in a sympathetic cringe. Stede looks up at him, mouth agape, and Lucius pats his shoulder again. "Yeah, about that…"

Ed stands on the fo'c'sle. He stares out at the horizon, the wind ruffling his hair, black and silver strands flowing, weightless, on playful gusts. He wears his leather trousers with one of Stede's shirts, deep red and ruffled, unbuttoned nearly to his navel. Basically, he looks fucking incredible. Not that you'd know it from the way Stede's been acting lately. And Izzy! Izzy, who he could always rely on for a quick ego boost when he needed it! And now…

Fuck.

He shakes his head, trying to clear it as he watches clouds rolling in—there'll be rain tonight. Not a storm, but a steady drizzle at least. Perfect moping weather. Pining weather, even. He looks great when he pines.

He risks a quick glance over his shoulder. Christ, nobody's even watching him. What a fucking waste.

He turns back to the sea, sighing deeply. Behind him, someone clears their throat.

"Dickfuck, what the hell!" He spins around, startled. Frenchie waves his hand hesitantly, his smile apologetic. "You scared the shit out of me, man!"

"Sorry," Frenchie says, keeping a wary distance between them. "Uh. Sorry, captain, I mean. I… uh, well…"

"Spit it out, man!" Ed snaps, not a single scrap of patience left in his entire body. Frenchie grimaces, but squares his shoulders.

"We, the crew I mean…" He clears his throat as Ed raises his brows, irritable. "We need to talk. About, like, your… your thing. You know. With Stede. And Izzy."

Ed crosses his arms, eyebrows still raised. Frenchie might be trying for a placating smile, but the look on his face is rictus tight.

"My *thing*," Ed says disdainfully. "My *thing* with Stede and Izzy? Seriously? And the crew chose you as what, their fucking spokeman?"

"Yeah," Frenchie says, shrugging eloquently. "Well, sort of. I mean, I drew the short straw."

Stede sits on the edge of the divan, his face as vivid red as the cursed coat he wasn't allowed to keep. Lucius leans against the wall opposite him, arms crossed, not entirely unsympathetic.

"So, you've all known…" he begins. Lucius rolls his eyes, exasperated.

"The whole time, yes," he interjects. "God, you know you're not, like, quiet, right? For fuck's sake Stede, it's not that big a ship!"

Stede looks down at his hands, folded limply in his lap.

"Ah," he says quietly. "Right. Good point. So, then…"

Lucius sighs, uncrossing his arms and coming to sit next to Stede. He pats Stede's knee, grimacing—Stede appreciates the gesture, nevertheless.

"We kind of thought you'd figure it out on your own," Lucius says gently, "but, well, it's been a while now, and you're all still miserable. Honestly, Stede, the vibes have been absolutely rancid for the past few weeks!"

A knock on the door startles Stede before he can respond.

"What–" he gasps, as Lucius smiles, looking worryingly smug.

"Right on time," he says, and stands to open the door.

Izzy's eyes widen as Jim marches him down the corridor to the captains' quarters. Frenchie and Ed are already standing outside, Frenchie just raising a hand to knock. He and Jim exchange a nod as they arrive. Ed stares at Izzy, eyes wide and liquid. Izzy shifts from foot to foot.

"Ed," he says quietly. He thinks it might be the first thing he's said to his captain since… well, since whatever he and Stede have been doing began.

"Hey, Iz," Ed says. If Izzy didn't know better, he'd think Ed sounded just as nervous as he feels.

Before either of them can say more, Frenchie knocks. Lucius answers the door, looking harried.

"Oh, thank god," he says, stepping back to let Jim herd the rest of them into the room. "I was really running out of things to say to him and I'm afraid he's going to start crying."

Stede, face drawn, eyes suspiciously wet, looks up from the divan.

"I'm not!" he squawks. "That is, I wasn't going to…"

Lucius rolls his eyes, sighing.

"Sure you weren't," he says and then, more gently. "Think about what I said,

yeah?"

And with that, he and Frenchie both slip out the door, closing it behind them. Izzy raises his eyebrows as Jim leans against the wall, picking their nails idly with a wicked-looking knife.

"So you're just staying then, eh?" he demands. A quick smile, there and gone, passes over Jim's face.

"I drew the short straw," they say, shrugging. Izzy sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. He can practically feel the rest of the crew hovering outside the door. Fuckers.

A sniff from the divan breaks the tense silence.

"Well," Stede says, sitting up a touch too straight. "I suppose we'd better have it out, then. Edward, Izzy and I have been… um… intimate–"

"Yeah, I mean, obviously–" Ed mutters.

"Fuck you mean, obviously?" Izzy interjects, suddenly and unaccountably incensed. He storms forward, nose to nose with Ed, or as close as he can get when he's still a head shorter than the long-limbed, doe-eyed bastard. "If it was so fucking obvious, why the fuck didn't you say something? Do something? You decided, what, you'd just skulk around the ship like a fucking kicked dog instead of–"

Izzy's diatribe cuts off with a shocked and somewhat muffled whimper as Ed pulls him into a kiss. Stede's jaw drops, throat working as he swallows, eyes fixed on Ed and Izzy as they wrap their arms around each other, kissing like drowning men sucking in air as they crest a wave.

Unnoticed, Jim turns and slips out of the room. Outside, Frenchie and Lucius look up, expectant.

"Well," Lucius hisses. "How did it go? Are they talking yet?"

A thump sounds from behind the door, followed by a distinctive, raspy moan. Frenchie sticks his fingers in his ears, humming loudly. Jim smirks.

"Eh," they say. "Close enough."



Art by eros_the_artist


Fic Section -
Archive Warnings
Apply

It's a Sad Song; It's a Tragedy

Written by vexbatch

Rating: T

Major tags: Main character death

Beta credit: LiraelClayr007

Summary:

After a long journey to hopefully leave the memory of Stede Bonnet behind, Edward and Izzy find themselves in a sudden storm.



Podfic by Anonymous



Podfic by Han @ chokedbyanangel

Edward, we can't hold on like this."

Izzy was gripping the railing as another deluge of water overcame the deck, soaking everything in sight. His boots were below, as were the rest of the crew's. At least he hadn't had to tell them what to do in a storm as he likely would've needed to do with the previous crew of the Revenge. The QAR was on their starboard side, similarly struggling against the sea, but Izzy was fairly certain they'd dropped anchor and were merely riding the waves out.

"Ed," Izzy tried again. "Put down anchor; let's ride it out."

Finally turning to Izzy from where he commanded the helm, Edward was a vision against the sinister light of the brief sunlight before the storm of the clouds would toss them into sudden darkness once more.

"We can do this, Iz. You and me. The storm can't touch us, the waves can't touch us, just—"

Ed reached out for him; Izzy was just close enough for Ed to snag his arm in a death-defying grip. Izzy could see the strain this put on the rest of him, still struggling to hold the wheel straight. But then Edward was reeling him in, and Izzy let go of the railing, and their mouths clashed together like two titans before the fall.

It made Izzy's blood sing, the hard press of lips, and he gasped when Ed bit at his lower lip. Opening his mouth, Izzy received the sacrament of Ed's tongue touching his lips, his tongue, his very being. His arms wrapped around Edward instead, senseless of the peril surrounding them; Izzy wanted to melt into Edward, meld themselves together until they'd never be separated again.

Certainly not by the memory of a posh twat who couldn't stand by Edward when he needed him.

Something jolted them, not just the memory of a man who was too weak for the life, but something on the ship. They pulled away from one another as a thundering crash sounded. Ed's eyes were half-lidded and dark, the depths of the ocean waiting to swallow Izzy up.

Somehow, he looked away.

In that moment, the yelling filtered through the air like the distant call of a lighthouse.

No, that *was* the distant call of a lighthouse behind screams from the crew.

Finally, *finally,* Izzy's eyes focused on the new obtrusion in the deck. They'd cracked up on the rocks, one of which was sticking through the deck. It anchored them as the waves beat against the hull. Izzy watched as the crew began to jump ship, swimming or drowning on the way to the QAR.

They all knew how fast ships could go down from a hit like that.

"Edward," Izzy breathed, and somehow Ed heard him.

"Iz."

These were the last words

Final utterances

Beleaguered sighs

Of Edward Teach and

Israel Hands

A captain goes down with his ship

And for a first mate

Well

Above all else is

Loyalty to your captain

To your way of life

To the only man you've ever loved

And been loved by in return.

Knocking on Heaven's Door

Written by Nadzieja

Rating: M

Major tags: Major character death

Beta credit: sweveris & ewelinakl

Summary: Edward and Izzy find each other at the very end of their lives. This doesn't stop them from enjoying what little remaining time they have together.

"We're here, Iz. We've made it. The ocean." Ed waves his hand in front of the vast body of water in front of them as if in an introduction. Deep blue all the way to the horizon, rippling in the wind.

Izzy understands the appeal now, he feels a vague pull towards it himself. An impulse to board the first outgoing ship and sail away.

But he's not going to, they're not going to. Both having an expiration date on their bodies; the only question being who will go first.

"Iz? Are you okay?" Ed's voice pulls him out of his train of thought. He looks so beautiful and carefree against the backdrop of the setting sun, wind blowing through his curls. "Having regrets?"

"No," Izzy finds himself saying, and smiling despite stealing a car and breaking at least half a dozen laws. It's surreal they made it all the way to the beach.

It feels like a miracle. It is a miracle. Just like meeting Ed at the hopeless hospital ward for terminally ill. Just like drinking rum with Ed from the same

bottle, thinking that it's practically kissing. Like Ed asking "wanna do something weird?" before they ran away from the hospital together.

Like having Edward all to himself a few days later in a hotel room.

"I don't regret a thing." Izzy repeats, and he means it. "I just wish we had more time."

"Nah, Iz, don't." Ed shakes his head. "It's better that way. You got to see the best of me. How long do you think it could last Iz, with someone like me? A year? Five years?"

"You're not giving yourself enough credit. Ed. At least ten."

Edward huffs a laugh at that. "Maybe, maybe. I did not peg you for an optimist, mate."

Izzy knows Edward enough now to see through his attempts to deflect the difficult conversations.

"I know what you think of yourself, Ed. And it's not true. You are trying so hard to make people like you, but you don't have to. It's okay to show the ugly parts, we all have them. You are lovable, not despite them but because of them. Five years or a year—I don't care, I'd take it."

"I know you would, Iz," Ed smiles back, and it's more open now, more genuine. "How long do you think we have left?"

"Oh, who the fuck knows. Till the evening maybe? Tomorrow? The day after that?"

"We can watch the sunset," Ed offers, sitting down on the sand and opening his arms in an invitation. "Come over here and let me love you till the end of our lives."

Izzy accepts it easily, cuddling to Edward's side. Suddenly he feels the full weight of the past days on his shoulders and he feels incredibly tired. He means to only close his eyes for a little bit, but Edward's embrace is so warm he loses that battle rather quickly.

But it's okay.

Ed will join him soon.



Art by Sweven

Beta Roundtable Discussion



Beta Roundtable Discussion

Betaing is at the very heart of fan labour. A beta reader is – or can be – the first port of call for a writer looking to improve their work, or one that simply needs a second set of eyes to catch little mistakes. Betaing can be an intensive commitment, or as straightforward as double checking for spelling and grammar – also known as SPAG – and missing pieces of punctuation.

Our roundtable brings a group of writers and betas together to discuss their thoughts on fandom, editing, and how to find a beta relationship that is fulfilling for everyone involved.



Participant	Indicator
Buoymehome	BH
Unopposablethumbs	UT
Jockles	JO
zythepsary	ZY
LaceratedLullabies	LL

Why have a beta?

Buoymehome:

Up until a year ago I was a no beta kind of writer. In part because I wrote short pieces (under 1k) that I felt I could review solo, and in part because of the if I don't post now, I'll never post feeling.

Then I took part in the Reverse Big Bang, where a requirement for beta was highlighted and here I was, needing to find someone who would find fault with my syntax and tenses. At first that was my belief. And a year later, a core group of betas and a few more long pieces later, I can say that it was a fantastic decision.

So why a beta? For a non-native English speaker like me, who learned grammar on the fly, it's been a journey in readjustment. It's made my understanding of the language that bit more clear, I've learned grammar terms I had to look up in the dictionary, it's been forcing me to develop, use all my words, clarify, simplify too sometimes. It's also made me less scared of long pieces, of tackling complicated storylines, because I know I have one or two people ready to jump in with me.

LL:

It's really interesting that your intro to being betaed was for a fan event, because I have avoided fan events in previous fandoms because of a combination of not wanting a beta and not knowing where to find one. Now in OFMD, mostly thanks to the connections I've made in discord servers, I'm a lot more willing to seek one out. Did the idea of needing a beta put you off at all, initially? And how did you feel first finding one?

BH:

It was sort of this nagging knowledge that I was eventually going to have to ask someone, as I was writing but I had avoided looking too closely at this specific bullet point. Then I had over 8k of words and it started to become a bit more urgent, so I started to look into what a beta could support on exactly and discovered that it could just be SPAG, which felt less daunting than imagining a big red pen slashing through everything.

I had been about a year in the fandom at that stage and had become friends with

a few people who were not just English speakers but also working in English academia (or adjacent). At that stage, the event discord was already feeling like a safe space so I was less worried about asking a stranger there, had those I approached said no.

I started with a beta purely for SPAG and have slowly embraced the fact that there is more to offer from their end. It's made me a better writer, who after a year of constant feedback is finally using her dialogue tags correctly before her beta starts to look at her piece. I think having a pool of people to support me, each with their own strengths, has really helped in feeling more confident about the story, the grammar, the writing, and whether or not there is a readership behind the piece.

JO:

This for me is the crux of the Beta Reader + Writer relationship. Fandom is such a community effort, and you can really bounce off another person in a way that's not really possible with original fiction because you're all starting from approximately the same place. I firmly believe that all fanfiction is a conversation – conversation with the original media, conversation with the fandom, conversation with fandom as a whole – and the writer/beta conversation is the most immediate manifestation of that.

BH:

Asking for support on one's writing is very much an exercise in letting go. Getting feedback is never easy and there may also be the element of feeling like one will be graded. For me, I moved into it due to a constraint after 20 years of writing on and off without one, but found the value that I didn't realise was in it. But there's a freedom in 'no beta we die like a Badminton', that maybe is seen as being lost should a beta be involved in the process.

ZY :

Do you find it easier to get feedback from a friend or a stranger? Sometimes I worry that a friend won't dig into the piece like I want them to, because they don't want to hurt my feelings. On the other hand, I'm more likely to trust what my friends tell me than someone I just met. I've had good experiences with both, so I go back and forth about which I prefer.

LL:

I've recently asked a friend to beta a piece, and I actually found it made me more nervous than asking a stranger. This is partly influenced by me being very sensitive to criticism – I think I prefer the thought of it coming from someone who doesn't know me personally.

UT:

I tend to prefer asking somebody I know, because then I have a better idea of whether we have a compatible approach to writing, especially creative writing. And when I do beta, I'm usually reading fic for friends, which for me often means that I have a better idea of what they value in their own writing, what they're trying to achieve, etc. But I also tend to be pretty comfortable receiving criticism, something that I think may come from working as an editor for so long. When I make a change in a client's text it's very impersonal, and I tend to take comments on my own work in that same spirit, and a lot of the people who've betaed my work, and who I've betaed for, have a similar professional background. I feel like whether you're working with strangers or friends, finding somebody who has a similar writing and editing philosophy to you is probably the biggest part of a successful collaboration.

BH:

At the start, it felt easier to ask friends. I felt more confident to state clearly I was only there for SPAG (in part to avoid getting unwelcome critique). Then they asked if they could just add little notes when they liked something or thought I could develop a bit more. Discovering this could be an enjoyable experience, with some actual learning along the way, really started to shift my perception of the role of beta. It also made me more able to ask for feedback, take that onboard and know what I actually want from that collaboration. It also made me more confident in my own writing, which lead my latest work to be betaed by someone I did not know personally but seemed to be able to help for that specific kind of piece. At the end of the day, it's easier to receive feedback when I have asked for it. I think for me, having those original betas, who I knew and trusted, ask me if it was okay to provide more insight than just SPAG, really helped in now being able to ask for it upfront myself.

What is the difference between suggesting and editing?

Unopposablethumbs:

I tend to think of any edits that I make in someone else's documents as suggestions—that's what track changes are for to some extent! In my professional work as an editor, I tend to only make small changes in the text itself, e.g. catching typos and mistakes in punctuation, or improving the flow of a sentence. Any more substantial suggestions, for example a sentence that I think needs to be completely rewritten, or a significant change in the piece as a whole, I approach with comments in the margins.

I've always been fascinated by language, and obviously given the job that I do, I have a strong grasp of grammar, syntax, punctuation, and other formal elements of writing. But the most important thing for me is always preserving the author's unique voice—as such, I want to give any writer I'm working with as much agency as possible to approach my suggestions as they prefer. I try to make that clear in the way I frame any changes I propose, and to make sure that I'm understanding the author's intent if I do make changes in the text.

LL:

I also prefer the approach of only directly editing small changes and leaving suggestions for bigger ones, for the same reason of me not wanting to alter the author's voice. It's really interesting to hear that this is your approach as a professional, was this a personal decision on your part? Or would you say it's a pretty typical approach of a professional editor?

UT:

I feel like it's an attitude I've encountered in a lot of language professionals I've worked with. A lot of us start from a place of being fascinated with/obsessed with language/grammar/writing, etc., and my anti-prescriptivist commitments developed over time. When I was a teenager I had more prescriptivist leanings, but as soon as I started to expand and enrich my understanding of language and grammar, those attitudes had to fall away. Especially in the context of creative writing, if

we just imposed a uniform, inflexible set of rules, I think we'd be destroying a lot of the beauty of the art we love. Most of the professionals I've worked with have similar attitudes, because we're all writers, too. Creative writing is first and foremost an art, and so ultimate creative control has to lie with the artist.

After I've done the work, I sort of release it to the universe—if an author wants to take my suggestions, that's great, but if they don't, I'm never going to be bothered by that. Their writing is theirs, and I know how deeply personal that can be. I want writers to feel like they can trust me with their work, and like I'm trying to bring out the best version of their writing, not force their writing to conform to some external standard.

JO:

I do think that a lot of working as a good beta is understanding that, in the end, you're really only ever making suggestions that help the author think about their work in a new way. I know that as a writer I've had hours of conversations with a beta reader about parts of the fic that they think can be improved by slight changes, and the ones that I want to work with again are the ones that react well to the end of this discussion being "I can do whatever I want forever" and I don't take their advice. I massively value how much having a beta reader improves my writing in general, and it is unusual for me to completely disregard a suggestion, but sometimes I like what I did, and the advantages of changing it don't outweigh the effort it would take for me to make that edit. As the beta reader, you've gotta be cool with the fact that you might get that from your writer, and that doesn't make you bad at being a beta, it just means that the author trusts you to either back away gracefully, and only push if it's really important (for whatever reason).

What's your process?

zythepsary:

I approach betaing the way I want a beta to work with me. I like open communication about timelines and what to expect, so my anxiety brain quiets down, and plenty of suggestions of where and how to improve. I like blunt, honest reactions, and I want to know when something isn't working right. I enjoy sending my work to someone and getting it back in pieces.

LL:

This is really interesting to me, as someone who's pretty much the exact opposite. Do you find you prefer to beta for people who prefer a similar approach to you? It's clear you're very considerate of what the author needs from you, but is there a particular approach you find comes easier to you or is more fun?

ZY:

No, I don't have a preference. Whatever the author wants from me, I'm happy to provide.

It's technically easier when someone says, "Tear this apart, please," because then I can work like I'm editing my own fic, but it's not more fun. Betaing is always fun. It's a puzzle! There's a problem to solve and someone needs me to figure out how.

Not everyone wants the same feedback from their beta, so I always talk with the author about what they need from me. Are they concerned about characterization or dialogue sounding right? Do they want to know if the piece flows well from beginning to end? Have they identified a weak point in the piece and need help figuring out how to resolve it? If I'm working with an author for the first time, I like to ask how comfortable they are with edits, too. It's important to know what kind of critiques are appropriate and how I should approach criticism, especially in a fandom space. We're amateurs with a shared hobby, not professionals.

When it's time to do the actual editing, I prefer to get it all done in one sitting so I can focus properly. The first thing I do is read through the whole thing and take notes on what catches my attention: character motivations and themes, writing

choices I like, or dialogue that hits my ear wrong so I can come back to it later. The only suggested corrections I'll make at this point are quick, easily fixed spelling or grammar errors. I comment on the lines or dialogue that I like, too.

Then, I read it again with a more critical eye. Unless the author has requested something specific, I cast a fairly wide net and look for problems. Do the character voices sound right? When characters move throughout the world, is it easy to imagine where they are? Do I understand the general plot? (And if I don't, do I have a blindspot or does something need to be adjusted in the piece?) In action or sex scenes, does everyone have the correct number of limbs? Are characters coming to conclusions on their own within the story, or are they making abrupt changes based on what the author needs to move everyone from Point A to Point B?

I look at readability, too. Is there a consistent tone throughout the piece? (And if not, does the contrast work well for the story?) Do the action and dialogue flow well together? How can we fix a clunky sentence or paragraph? Does a scene work better if we rearrange the dialogue and action? What happens if the dialogue is cut entirely? When I edit my own work, I rearrange sentences and tweak lines all the time, so I tend to do that a lot when I beta. (And I make sure to note that these are only suggestions, because everyone has their own style and I'm not the ultimate authority on that. I'm just another writer.)

After the first round of edits, I read the piece again, double-checking for anything I missed. I read multi-chapter works even more so I can make sure everything comes together neatly. Once I'm satisfied, I send it back to the author with a summary of the suggested changes and what I enjoyed about the piece. That's usually the end of my part, but I'll always do another pass if the author requests it.

How do you find a beta who's a good match for you and your story?

LaceratedLullabies:

I find betas pretty much exclusively through discord. There are several servers I'm part of where writers can request betas for their fics, usually providing a description of the fic, its length and a timeframe so people can volunteer to beta according to their interests and availability. I have also seen a set-up with potential betas posting introductions describing the kind of fics they're happy to read, and what kind of advice and criticism they can offer, so that authors can get in touch with them.

BH:

I am in some similar discords and found that it did a lot in making me feel comfortable, first to reach out to my friends for a beta, and now for asking the wider community for specific projects. I have found those places to be a good way to better understand the possibilities out there, whether or not we want a beta to start with.

JO:

I have also made most of my beta relationships through discord, though I once reached out on a fic I was in the middle of writing for one of my readers to beta for me, which actually worked out pretty well in the end.

There are many discords where you can share snippets and get a micro-critique on paragraphs or bits of dialogue, or you can brainstorm something from your plot without opening up to a full beta read. This sort of thing done in a more informal setting can let you (as a beta) get a view into how the author is thinking and what sort of critique they respond well to before you commit to a full beta read, or as a writer let you figure out who you bounce off well in a discussion about your concept. It's not a guarantee that you're going to have a good working relationship as author/beta, but it can help break the ice a little.

ZY:

Smaller spaces, like exchanges or writing-specific discords, are a great place to find betas and fellow writers—and friends, and community. It's easy to get lost in fandom, especially when so much is scattered across several different platforms.

I'm in a few of those discords, and I really enjoy it. Great experience all around.

LL:

Finding a good beta depends on what you're looking for, but all betas should be considerate of what kind of criticism the author wants. Personally I'm someone who is very sensitive to criticism, and as a writer this has put me off seeking out a beta for years. I've only recently felt comfortable enough to request betas because I know there are people I can ask to be gentle with me and give me encouragement, as well as suggestions to help me improve. However, this isn't what every author wants – I know there are some authors who prefer a more ruthless approach and want a beta who will be more harsh on their writing. What makes someone a good beta for one person can also make them a poor fit for someone else.

In general, I think you'll know you've found a good beta if you look through your work after following their suggestions and think that it is better than it was before, and this process of improving your writing hasn't left you feeling upset or discouraged in any way.

UT:

I think this is one of the reasons I often prefer to work with a friend, or at least someone who knows me decently well, when I'm doing beta work as opposed to professional editing. My background definitely means I can come off blunt, especially if I'm moving quickly, and I'd hate to make somebody feel badly about their writing. Honestly, that's the opposite of what I'm trying to do in any kind of editing, but my tendency to make comments as brief as possible can definitely come off harsh. When I'm working with somebody who knows me, I feel like they're more likely to know already that I'm not trying to be a dick, and I don't think their writing is garbage, I'm just trying to help as efficiently as possible. I know this is a tendency of mine, though, so I try to always highlight the things I enjoy in a story as well as the changes I'm suggesting.

LL:

I think it's important to establish from the start what approach both the author and the beta want to take. The author should know what areas they want the beta to focus on (e.g. SPAG, characterisation, narrative flow and consistency, etc.) and the kind of comments they want, particularly if they prefer someone very gentle or very harsh, as someone who tends to the opposite extreme might not be a good fit. It also helps for betas to know what kind of criticism they are willing to offer.

Ideally, if you don't think your styles are compatible after discussing this, it'd be best to seek out someone else, but obviously issues may still come up even if you think you're on the same page. Sometimes they can be resolved by talking it through with the beta, and sometimes it may be best to request someone else in future.

Overall, I'd say communication is key. Know what you want as an author and what you're willing to give as a beta, and understand that your preferences won't work for everyone else, and that's okay.

How do you as a beta approach the initial expectations conversation?

Jockles:

I have to say that I always use the Beta Reader template that was shared with me a few years back, put together on AO3 here. It's a fantastic resource for beta readers and writers looking for beta readers generally, but I do find the included checklist incredibly helpful. It lets me get in my head the sorts of things that I might look out for, and reminds me of what I'm good at and what I struggle with. I think it's important to be honest as a beta reader what your strengths are, and not take it personally if an author wants a second or third opinion. My favourite secondary aspect of the article is reminding myself, and my author, that I need to set a time-table. I can do different levels of edit in different timeframes, and there's a certain amount of time it takes me to straight up read the text. I know that I can't just read and re-read a massive work in rapid succession, I need time for it to percolate in my brain before I can read it again and give additional feedback after my first read.

After the purely practical consideration, I think a lot of what I want to offer comes down to the relationship with an author. I might start working fresh with a new author and be gentle, give them softer feedback that doesn't cut out paragraphs or rearrange the story (even if they say they're happy with that) because a lot of that initial work with an author is actually, in my opinion, reassuring them that you do actually like their writing, and that they're telling a story you're enjoying.

UT:

I think this is a great point, and building trust with an author is a huge part of being helpful to them as an editor. Do you tend to build longstanding betaing relationships with authors you work with, or do you tend to work with a wider range of writers and switch it up more frequently?

JO:

I usually don't beta unless it's someone I know already, but I keep myself on various lists for beta readers and read every request. Some of my best beta/writer relationships (both as a writer and as beta) have come from those 'open calls', and I think that's because when you're inviting a stranger in to look at your work, you can set the boundaries more clearly. I find that having a friend do a beta read, you can sometimes not get useful critique (they often fall too heavily on the "it's great you're wonderful" feedback side, which is great but eventually, I do want critique) or it puts pressure on the relationship if you feel like you're critiquing too heavily. Some friendships can withstand that, but not all.

Existing beta/writer relationships are always pretty wonderful. There really is no feeling quite like a writer you've worked with before rocking up in your DMs with a Gdoc link and a bashful expression. The initial conversation about expectation can go faster, and you can get to work and get stuck into the critique a lot faster (after the very important initial "omg I love it this is so fun/hot/insane/sad" step) and your critique gets more interesting and nuanced once you start to understand someone's writing style, or things they know they struggle with so you can go ham on corrections without feeling like you're gonna make them sad, or you're removing their voice.

There are a few people I know that I will beta for whenever they ask no matter what, because I know that I'm going to enjoy their writing, they're never gonna include any of my squicks, and I know exactly what kind of feedback they appreciate and how harsh I can be. That is unusual, however.

A lot of fiction generally, but fanfiction especially, involves a baring of the soul, and I want to be sensitive to that. Of course, after we've been chatting for a few weeks, I would be more comfortable bringing up more structural issues with a work, the things that might involve significant rewrites. I would never mention that sort of thing for a simple SPAG request, but even good writers who are confident and who want to really get harsh feedback about their story are still writing fanfiction – this is for fun, and they're here to enjoy themselves, and it's not fun for a stranger to come up to you and the first thing they say to you is "Just cut these three paragraphs."

BH:

This really captures the original feeling I had regarding having a beta. Having a better understanding of what a beta can be, and the many options available to the authors really made a difference.

ZY:

Yeah, same. It took me about five years to gather up the courage to look for a beta and then a few more to get comfortable with feedback. I think cheer-reading or bouncing ideas around with someone is a good way to ease yourself into it.



Backmatter



Signoff and Acknowledgements

This zine started with a series of messages in our server mod chat from Swev, which amounted to "*what if we did a server zine? Someone talk me out of this.*" Well, we didn't. We said "*what if we talked you into this instead?*" So thank you to everyone who was discussing zines in the server in November; you're terrible influences!



We literally couldn't have done any of this without our wonderful contributors. We hope you had fun creating for this zine! And thanks to the sprinting crew, who doubtlessly supported a significant amount of the writing here. While we're a writing-focused server, we're not a writing-only server. Lustig provided the constellation illustrations, which we liked so much we changed almost our entire aesthetic around to use as many as we could! It did also exacerbate redshift's concerning watercolour addiction, but we think ultimately that turned out fine too. Our wonderful Swev provided the beautiful cover art, with a little background help from redshift. Thanks so much for bringing our project to life.



Thanks also to the Canyon Artist's Den, run by nadsdraws and Swev, who let us share our project there. And thanks to the wonderful artists who were tempted over to illustrate our members' wonderful fics! If you're interested in joining the Artist's Den, consider contacting them through the Gateway server here: *discord.gg/sxSBkG8Rgm*

We'd like to take an extra moment to acknowledge the betas who lent their capable eyes to the fics in this document. So thank you to: *Clockwork, Despising_Tories, ewelinakl, frazzledwriter, hotcryptidsummer, Kat, LiraelClayr007, little fingies, MoonyGolightly, Nadzieja, queenclio, redshift, reechiebun, stephsvoid* and *Sweven.*

Thanks to you too, reader! As much as we write for ourselves, we also write to share. We hope you enjoyed this zine, and if you think you might enjoy being a part of our Canyon Writers' Workshop, feel free to come check us out here: *discord.gg/QpNUMTwPpJ*

Canyon Writers' Workshop

Canyon Artists' Den

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Tumblr: redshift-ao3

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SWEV.ART 24

About this zine

The Canyon Writers' Workshop is proud to present this collection of fic and chaotic collaborations alongside thoughtful discussions, art, and more! Izzy enjoyers, come see what we have for you!